

PCZONE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

FAR CRY

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

**WORLD EXCLUSIVE
REVIEW
& DEMO**



ANY COMPO:
Who is the developer
behind Far Cry?

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FIRST SCREENSHOTS!

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

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Size Doesn't Matter



They (whoever they are) say that you've got about 3.5 seconds to convince someone to buy your magazine using your front cover. Bright colours and snappy headlines help,

but as a games magazine it's all about getting the right game on the front.

Conventional wisdom states that you should put the biggest game regardless of quality on the cover. If you've only got 3.5 seconds to grab someone by the balls, then a name that jumps off the page is a good start. But we've never considered ourselves 'conventional'. *PC ZONE* is a maverick, a magazine that boldly goes in search of the best games, regardless of who's developed it, or whether it's got a number after the name. For a game to take pride of place on our front cover, it's got to be something special, a game that I'd be willing to take home, wine and dine and spend the night with. If it's really good, I might even make it breakfast.

We did it with *Call Of Duty* – *PC ZONE* was the first magazine in the world to put the hitherto unknown game on its front cover back in June last year – and we've done it again, with *Far Cry*, a game that other magazines spurned because, in their words, 'it's not a big name'. If everyone shared the same opinion, games like this would sink, the developers would be forced to rely on word of mouth to drive sales and publishers like Ubisoft would be less likely to take a punt on something new. We knew it was going to be huge as soon as we saw the early code on display last summer and now that we've played the finished game, we're convinced it's going to be one of the biggest names in years to come. A front cover with *Far Cry 2* on it later this year? Don't bet against it...

Dave Woods

Dave Woods
Editor



FAR CRY P64

Is the evolution of the first-person shooter finally here? Find out with our massive world exclusive review

COVER DISCS P134 →

■ FIVE EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...

Unreal Tournament 2004, *Painkiller*, *Colin McRae Rally 04*, *Desert Rats vs Afrika Korps* and *Sacred*.

PLUS *Hidden & Dangerous 2* single-player demo and an extra *Splinter Cell* level, exclusive to *PC ZONE*.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVE

EIGHT demos exclusive to the DVD, including *Alpha Black Zero*, multiplayer versions of *Vietcong: First Alpha* and *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, plus this month's 'Game That Changed The World', *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* (see page 138).

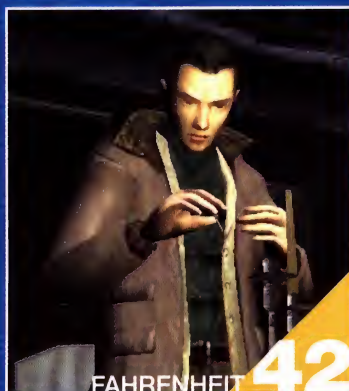


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CHAMP MAN-BEATER REVEALED!

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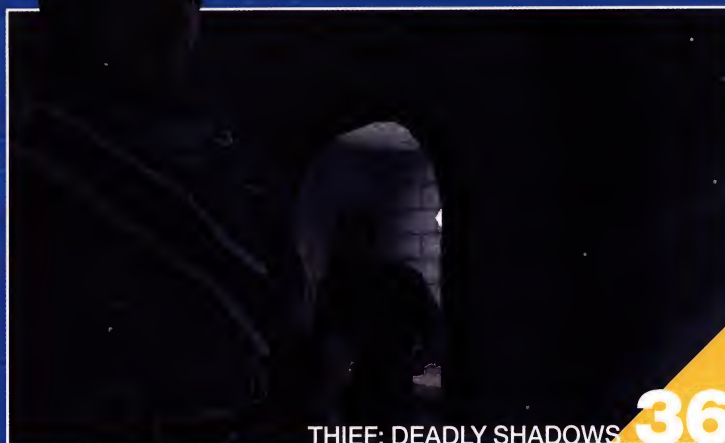
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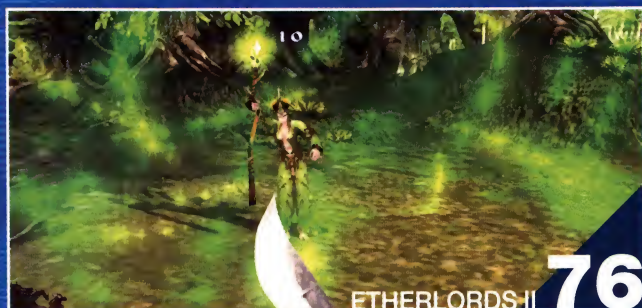
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WIN!

TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (140), PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: March 31, 2004. The winner of our February Tiny Compo (138) is Innes Clatworthy from Edgware, who gets a copy of *TOCA Race Driver* for knowing that ten kills in *Unreal Tournament 2004* will put you on a 'Rampage'. Respect due.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Dennis or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!

Manager Links Game

Squad List

No	Name	Pos
1	Lee Carroll	GK
2	Simon Bassey	D/DM RLC
3	Michael Harvey	D/AM L
4	Matt Everard	D C
5	Danny Oakins	D RC
6	Gavin Bolger	M RC
7	Lee Sidwell	M R
8	Lewis Taylor	D/DM C
9	Joe Sheerin	F C
10	Kevin Cooper	S C
11	Ryan Gray	AM L
12	Andy Sullivan	AM RL
14	Darren Dobinson	D/AM L
15	Paul Scott	F LC
16	Paul Quinn	D L
17	Matt Martin	GK
--	Jamie Angell	D C
--	Seb Favata	DM C
--	Noel Franklin	AM C
--	Steve Gibson	D R
--	Gareth Graham	AM C
--	Clinton Moore	F C
--	Keith Ward	D/DM RLC

Line Up

Whole Team
Use Whole Team
Age Friendly

Competitions Europe England Non-League AFC Wimbledon

Grass roots football with the recently-formed AFC Wimbledon.

OFF LICENCE

Sega and SI are hoping to obtain licences that enable them to use official shirts. It's not a problem with AFC Wimbledon, as they're sponsored by SI.

ENGINE ROOM

The game engine is being improved to incorporate more than 30 extra fields for player data, most of them invisible, which will have to be discovered by scouting.

THE LOAN ARRANGER

Enhanced player loan options mean that managers can now approach other clubs to offer young players on loan, in order to give them valuable experience.

Friday 13 February 2004

Friendly Match

Manager Links Game

Overview

Friendship Match
Second Half from The Fans Stadium

AFC WIMBLEDON 4

- Ryan Gray (2)
- Joe Sheerin (23,55)
- Kevin Cooper (pen 44)

SUN POSTAL SPORTS 1

- Sean Sonner (66)
- Marc Duffy went off (44)
- Alex Kemp injured (11)

Referred by Mr Referee
Attendance: 4,127

Weather: Pitch Condition: Fantastic

Live Updates

GOAL! AFC WIM 1-0 SUN SP R.GRAY (2)

GOAL! EVERTON 1-0 BRIGHTON J.MCFADDEN (7)

GOAL! BURY 0-1 CAMBRIDGE J.TURNER (10)

GOAL! EVERTON 2-0 BRIGHTON J.MCFADDEN (15)

GOAL! AFC WIM 2-0 SUN SP J.SHEERIN (23)

GOAL! DERBY 0-1 DUNDEE N.NOVO (2)

GOAL! AFC WIM 3-0 SUN SP K.COOPER (PEN 44)

GOAL! AFC WIMBLEDON 3-0 SUN POSTAL SPORTS

HT EVERTON 2-0 BRIGHTON

HT BURY 0-1 CAMBRIDGE

HT DERBY 0-1 DUNDEE

HT LINCOLN 0-0 GRIMSBY

HT NORTHAMPTON 0-0 PRESTON

HT PRO VERCCELLI 0-0 Q.P.R

HT READING 0-0 ROTHERHAM

GOAL! LINCOLN 0-1 GRIMSBY P.JEVONS (49)

GOAL! AFC WIMB 4-0 SUN SP J.SHEERIN (55)

GOAL! PRO VERCCELLI 0-1 Q.P.R P.FURLONG (59)

GOAL! EVERTON 3-0 BRIGHTON D.FERGUSON (65)

GOAL! PRO VERCCELLI 0-2 Q.P.R K.GALLEN (65)

GOAL! AFC WIM 4-1 SUN SP S.SONNER (66)

SPLITTING IMAGE

For the first time, the screen can be split into two panels, enabling you to watch your match while keeping an eye on the latest scores, for instance.

SQUAD-BASED

As well as rating individual players, coaches will now offer their opinion on the squad as a whole, thus helping you to ascertain which areas need strengthening.

Harvey plays a great through ball to Sheerin...

RADIO LIVE TRANSMISSION

If you like reading snippets of text, the perennial 'radio commentary' will still be available. SI is also promising that it will be improved.

BULLETIN

GAME FOR A LAUGH

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Maybe I'm an awkward, dour-faced Northerner (you are – Ed), but I can count the number of so-called 'comedy' games that I've actually laughed out loud at on one foot. *The Secret Of Monkey Island* is one, *Sam & Max: Hit The Road* is two, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* on the N64 is number three – and, erm, that's it.

The problem with games such as the recent shooter *Armed And Dangerous*, is that they often try too hard to get giggles, relying on sub-Monty Python gags that should've been buried in the back of a Terry Pratchett novel years ago. However, the games that are truly funny don't need overly clever scripts – actions speak louder than words.

My personal favourite, *GTA: Vice City*, succeeds in getting big laughs from extreme violence. Just plough a helicopter into a shopping mall packed with people and angle those blades towards the horrified bystanders. Now that's comedy.

Anyhow, in Bulletin this month, we have a big, big exclusive on *Tribes: Vengeance*, a special report on the growing machinima scene (page 12), the first PC images of *Hitman: Contracts* (page 19) and a batch of unbelievable shots from strategy epic *Rome: Total War* (page 26). Don't forget to check out *Emulation Zone* (page 15), plus new regular *Indie Zone* (page 20), in which we'll be bringing you the latest reviews and free games from independent developers.

By the way, this is the last Bulletin I'll be presenting folks, as I'll be shifting my attentions to the preview section, bringing you the best new info, interviews and hot screenshots from the biggest PC games. Over to you Will...

JUMPING JETPACKS

WE SPEAK EXCLUSIVELY TO MICHAEL JOHNSTON, SENIOR DESIGNER ON *TRIBES: VENGEANCE*, ABOUT MULTIPLAYER, MAPS AND MUCH MORE

EYEBROWS WERE raised, sharp intakes of breath were made and buttocks were shuffled uncomfortably in chairs across the world when the news broke that Dynamix, developer of popular team-based first-person shooter franchise *Tribes* was shutting its doors.

However, it appears that gamers' fears of a poor third incarnation of *Tribes* aren't going to be realised, with news that Irrational is taking over the helm. Irrational is famous for the excellent sci-fi FPS/RPG *System Shock 2* and has drafted in Michael 'KineticPoet' Johnston from the online community as senior designer of the project.

PC ZONE spoke exclusively to Michael about the forthcoming single-player and multiplayer *Tribes: Vengeance*, specifically asking him to elaborate on the new multiplayer modes, which the company has kept schtum about – until now...

PC ZONE: Why should gamers be excited about the multiplayer element of *Tribes: Vengeance*?

MICHAEL JOHNSTON: For those who might not know, *Tribes* is a game where you have a jetpack at all times. It's a game about infantry combat in three dimensions. You have



Tribes: Vengeance multiplayer will support up to 32 players.

a variety of equipment at your disposal which you can mix and match, allowing you to create unique classes according to your own individual playing style. You also have access to an assortment of gadgets, base devices and vehicles.

Tribes: Vengeance is a new *Tribes* game with new features, but at heart it's still a game about 3D combat across a variety of indoor and outdoor environments. The goal with *Tribes: Vengeance* is to attract new players to the franchise while preserving the multiplayer excitement that existing *Tribes* players have come to love. And, for the first time ever, you can play through a full

story-driven single-player campaign to prepare yourself for online battles.

PCZ: What new features are you adding to the multiplayer modes in the game?

MJ: We're using a system we call Unified Game Mode (UGM). You can think of it like a sandbox. In this sandbox you can have a number of different toys, and each toy can be used in different ways. So we have UGM objects, like Flags, Balls and Goals, and game types simply combine these objects in particular ways. A conventional Capture the Flag game would combine Capture Flags and Capture Stands. A sports-oriented game might combine Balls and Goals. Some experimental game might combine all of these objects and more. However, the name of the game is always the same: use the objects at your disposal to score more points than the other team.

PCZ: Can you reveal anything about the new maps and what features make them special?

MJ: We have one map that hasn't been shown yet which is a really long gorge surrounded by a relatively flat desert. The gorge looks great, filled with lush vegetation and bounded by rocky cliff faces – and it's pretty fun to jet and ski in. A bridge stretches from one end to the other with bases at either end.





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Latest charts and release dates

"The goal is to attract new players to the franchise while preserving the multiplayer excitement"

Another map we have is completely underground, so you're jetting and skiing around stalactites and stalagmites as you travel between bases. Also, we have a great map that takes place in a massive outdoor arena reminiscent of the Coliseum, complete with cheering fans.

PCZ: Will the new ragdoll physics add to the multiplayer experience?

MJ: Ragdoll physics are just eye candy. They're a nice little visual reward for defeating enemy players and particularly fun to watch in a game like *Tribes*, where you often nail your enemies while in the air at high speeds.

PCZ: What new weapons will players be able to unleash in *Tribes: Vengeance*?



Irrational is pouring polygons into the lush environments.

MJ: There are a few new weapons, but we're only revealing details about a couple of them for now. The Rocket Pod launches a cluster of spiralling missiles that follow where you're looking after they launch, which allows you to control them. The Burner shoots balls of burning flame that set areas (and people) on fire.

PCZ: Will you include classic maps such as the snow level, Katabatic?

MJ: We're not including any classic maps with *Tribes: Vengeance*, but I suspect that

the highly active *Tribes* development community will create new versions of these maps as soon as possible.

PCZ: Can you be sure both old and new players will enjoy *Tribes: Vengeance*?

MJ: This is a tough issue. I played *Tribes* competitively for a few years, so it's very important to me that we try to preserve what made the game special to so many people. We also have people on our development team who didn't play *Tribes* at all, so we use their feedback to try and



Your first look at one of the new multiplayer levels.

adjust the game to be more broadly appealing. I don't think it's possible (or even necessarily desirable) to make the game appealing to every single person out there, but we're aiming for a sweet spot where enough new people and existing *Tribes* 1 and 2 players like the game in order to establish a healthy online community.

■ **Publisher:** VU Games
■ **Developer:** Irrational Games
■ **ETA:** Q4 2004
■ **Website:** www.irrationalgames.com

Hot Source

VALVE BACK ON TRACK AS HALF-LIFE 2 GEARS UP FOR POSSIBLE SUMMER RELEASE

IN A RECENT interview with CNN/Money, Valve's director of marketing Doug Lombardi announced an approximate release "window" for sci-fi shooter blockbuster *Half-Life 2*. "We're currently targeting this summer for the completion of *Half-Life 2*," said Lombardi, although the company is still resisting the confirmation of a solid release date.

Valve has suffered a series of setbacks since missing the original release date of September 30 2003, most seriously being the illegal hacking and subsequent pirate release of the *Half-Life 2* source code. However, it's now clear that the PC's most eagerly awaited title is back on track, and gamers will soon have the opportunity

to begin designing levels for *Half-Life 2* before the release, with the launch of a free Software Development Kit (SDK).

In other *Half-Life 2* news, the game's impressive Source engine has been licensed for another PC game – an unnamed title by Arkane Studios, previously responsible for RPG *Arx Fatalis*. The other Source-powered game *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* developed by Troika is still due later this year according to publisher Activision, despite Internet reports of a 2005 launch.

■ **Publisher:** VU Games
■ **Developer:** Valve
■ **ETA:** Summer
■ **Website:** www.half-life2.com

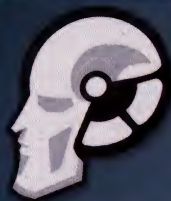
"The game's impressive Source engine has been licensed for an unnamed title by Arkane Studios"



Roll on the summer – Half-Life 2 approaches.



"If I were a rich Xen, doo-be-do-be-do-be-do-be-do-be-do-be-do-be-dum..."



2003 MACHINIMA AWARDS

REINVENTING THE REEL

SPECIAL REPORT

Forged from our favourite PC games, machinima has emerged as a whole new storytelling medium, reports **Pavel Barter**



Fountainhead Entertainment's *Anna* won Best Technical Achievement.

ON THE DVD FOR AS LONG as anyone can remember, games, movies and animation have been flirting outrageously with one another without any sense of long-term commitment. Classic games like *Final Fantasy* and *Street Fighter* have excitedly ventured into tinsel town, only to return humiliated by their torrid affairs. Blockbuster spin-offs such as *Enter The Matrix* have fared slightly better on PC, but the courtship with Hollywood has continued to be a relationship more on/off than Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck.

However, somewhere along the line these media indulged in a threesome, and now their mongrel

hybrid lovechild is busy clawing its way up the ladder of popular culture. Say howdy, folks, to machinima – 'machine cinema'.

Using game engines from top PC titles like *Unreal* and *Quake*, garage auteurs are directing movies in virtual worlds, recording action and events in real-time and creating fantastic characters. According to Paul Marino, executive director of the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences, machinima not only marks the "convergence of three mediums", it's also a fast, cheap and spanking "new way to create visually-based stories".

Steven Spielberg dabbled in this new art form for his movie *Artificial Intelligence: AI*. Plus, last year saw the first machinima music video played on MTV



Tum Raider: Lara's eaten all the pies.



Larry and Lenny Lumberjack give a campaign speech.

(*In The Waiting Line*), the first machinima TV series (*Portal* for cable channel G4), and under the watchful eye of grizzled thespian Robert Redford, machinima productions were reportedly screened at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival.

FESTIVAL OF FUN

For the last two years, the Machinima Academy has held a film festival in New York, attracting digital Tarantinos from around the globe. "We had approximately 700 attendees for the last one-day event (in October 2003) and we're already planning for this year, which we hope to be even larger," says Paul Marino. Shorts screened at the 2003 event included *The Outcome* (based on PC game *Dark Age Of Camelot*), *Common Sense Cooking* (two doofuses trying to master a barbecue) and *LoveDeath*, a ballet set

to the music of Wagner using *Quake III: Arena* assets (yup, you heard that right).

Nominated for Best Picture and Best Independent Film, and helping bolster the industry this side of the Atlantic was UK-produced *Bouncer Please*. "We've had a lot of offers from in and outside the community for help on the next *Bouncer Please* film, which is encouraging. I'm pleased that the US has taken so well to a machinima film that's so British," says Londoner Leo Lucien-Bay.

Edinburgh-based Strange Company – who contributed to the 2003 Festival with *Ozymandias*, a short adaptation of a Shelley poem – is the world's oldest professional machinima production company, established six years ago. Strange svengali Hugh Hancock contends that the UK has more machinima production groups "than any country bar

"Machinima has become more sophisticated, suggesting it can rival studios like Pixar in future"

SCENE

TAKE



Red vs Blue (above) scooped the Best Film gong at the 2003 Machinima Awards with *Blood Gulch Chronicles*.

the US". He continues: "There was a machinima documentary on Scottish TV last year and we're hoping our upcoming *Steelwight* series will see machinima hit the mainstream of film and TV. Another UK company, Kelseus, is developing a program, *Antics*, which may well become the standard pro-machinima platform."

HISTORY LESSON

Machinima was forged in the mid-to-late 1990s with the rise of 3D first-person shooters. Soon after 1996 and *Quake*, a group called the Rangers created *Diary of A Camper*. This founding father is little more than a deathmatch with a camera, but it set machinima's stage in blood and gristle. Others followed. Alongside Strange Company (*Eschaton*, *The Matrix 4x1*), the ILL Clan produced touching comedic shorts like *Apartment Huntin'* and *Hardly Workin'*, tales of two itinerant lumberjacks and their quest to find employment.

Machinima has gradually become more sophisticated, suggesting it has the ability to rival animation studios like Pixar in the future. Fountainhead Entertainment creates gripping shorts like *Sidrial*, about the last outpost between Earth and extinction. *Rendezvous*, an Australian production, is a love story between two deep-space probes; and *Hero* (based on *Battlefield 1942*) follows a single soldier fighting heroically against Nazis. But although most machinima is innovative, some is hardly intended for a mass consumer audience, as it bypasses plot in favour of game engine quirks.

"I was browsing the *Halo* websites and discovered that people were performing tricks with the game engine, climbing to unreachable areas of the game," says Randall Glass, creator of *Warthog Jump*. "I felt I could top all the stunts by reaching the top of one of the mountains in the game. I figured out how to collect a pile of grenades by shooting my own team-

mates (who dropped their ammo when they died), parked a Warthog vehicle on top of the pile, set off a chain reaction and sent it flying. I picked out the best few minutes of game footage and edited it all together with a rockin' soundtrack."

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

The reaction of game developers to this twist in their creative tails has been positive. *Halo* creator Bungie was so impressed with *Warthog Jump* that it took Randall on a tour of its studio and flew him to E3 as its guest. "Not bad for a three-and-a-half minute video of a jeep blowing up," he laughs. Some developers have embraced the new medium wholeheartedly. Will Wright of Maxis is talking about putting movie-making tools in the next version of *The Sims* and Lionhead's *The Movies* will almost certainly incorporate machinima.

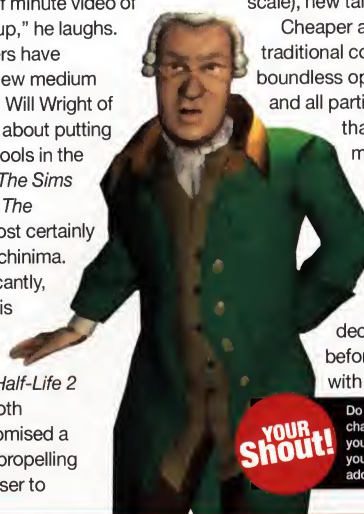
More significantly, the community is chewing its keypads in anticipation of *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*. Both games have promised a machinima kit, propelling the medium closer to

traditional CGI quality and furthering its potential as a storytelling medium.

"*Doom 3* has a lighting model which means that machinima creators can finally use the full range of lighting and shadow tricks that have always been available to filmmakers in other media," says Strange Company's Hugh Hancock. "What these new engines won't change though, is that you still need the talent and skill of David Lynch to make a film as great as *Eraserhead*. But that's the point of machinima: by removing limitations that filmmakers normally face (budget and scale), new talent can shine through."

Cheaper and faster to make than traditional computer animation, there are boundless opportunities for the medium, and all participants remain convinced that within the next few years machinima will become ingratiated into mainstream entertainment. The flirtation between movies, games and animation has smitten the public imagination for decades; it won't be long before we happily jump into bed with the union of all three. **PCZ**

Do you feel machinima can eventually challenge the Pixars of the world? Have you produced any machinima movies yourself? Write to **PC ZONE** at the usual address and let us know...



MEAN MACHINES

CREAM OF THE MACHINIMATION CROP - ON THE PC ZONE DVD. SEE MORE AT WWW.MACHINIMA.COM



WARTHOG JUMP

(Randall Glass)
Warthog vehicles leap into the air like Zebedee from *The Magic Roundabout*. An ingenious manipulation of the *Halo* engine.



LARRY & LENNY ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

(ILL Clan)
Two lumberjacks wreak havoc in a satirical swipe at the US political system.



BLOOD GULCH CHRONICLES

(Red vs Blue)
A series of darkly comic shorts with soldiers from *Halo* who grow bored, ponder the meaning of life, then shoot each other anyway.



BOUNCER PLEASE

(Leo Lucien-Bay)
Virtual bouncers are just as snotty as their real-life counterparts in this skit, constructed under the mantle of *Quake II*.



ANNA

(Fountainhead)
Creating great machinima is down to "a great story, script or concept", says Fountainhead's Katherine Anna Kang.

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EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR **STUART CAMPBELL**

ATARI'S BIG CAT CLAWS ONTO PC

IT'S A GOOD rule of thumb to say that emulation of gaming hardware generally runs two full generations behind the current state of the art. When your reporter started to write about emulation seriously, almost a decade ago, the 32-bit PlayStation and Saturn were just getting into their stride, and decent emulations of the 16-bit SNES, Mega Drive and Amiga were all just pipe dreams. Now we're a generation on, those machines can all be recreated to perfection on even the humblest PC, and the world's tireless emu coders are finally nailing the next hardware generation up – the pioneers of 64-bit gaming.

Alert readers will recall that a year ago this month, Emu Zone brought you the first news of Project Tempest, the

Atari Jaguar emulator. While an impressive technical achievement, it wasn't all that playable – but a year on, the emu has progressed in leaps and bounds. Speed, sound, compatibility and graphics have all been boosted, to the point where the awesome *Tempest 2000* (the game the emu was created to

NEW!
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'Warp' doesn't begin to cover it.

play, hence the name) now runs full-screen at full speed with full sound and joypad control. (It even works on Emu Zone's creaking Athlon 2000XP with a cheapo graphics card.) Ten years after its release, *T2K* remains one of the most overpowering gaming experiences ever created; if you haven't played it before, you owe it to yourself to sample it now.

ARMY MEN RIP

Meanwhile, the ill-fated 3DO console, which also shared the vanguard of the 64-bit revolution with the Jaguar, has also been caught in the EmuNet. (Its failure directly, sort of, led to the blight on gaming that was the *Army Men* series, and you don't get fates iller than that...) The emulation of 3DO, FreeDO (see what they did there?) is at an early stage (comparable, in fact, to the

first time we looked at Project Tempest), but can already run 3DO game images at a playable speed with sound.

In its very short life, the console played host to some excellent titles. These included the classic two-player tank battle *Return Fire*, a *Need For Speed* game that Electronic Arts has failed to live up to ever since, and the first fully-3D version of *FIFA International Soccer*, which blazed the trail for all sports games as we know

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

“We brought you the first news of Project Tempest a year ago... Now it's progressed in leaps & bounds”

them today. Emu Zone isn't sure if that's something we should thank the 3DO for or not, but there you have it. [X3](#)

LINKS

pt.emuunlim.com – download Project Tempest

www.freedo.org – download FreeDO

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

CRAZY CLIMBER 2000 (NICHIBUTSU, PLAYSTATION)



Just take the elevator, you idiot.

Since we've got a bit of a '2000' vibe going on in Emulation Zone this month, it's worth taking a moment to once again celebrate one of the chief reasons that emulation is so great – namely, the chance to play games the software industry didn't deign us worthy of being allowed to legitimately because we live in the wrong country.

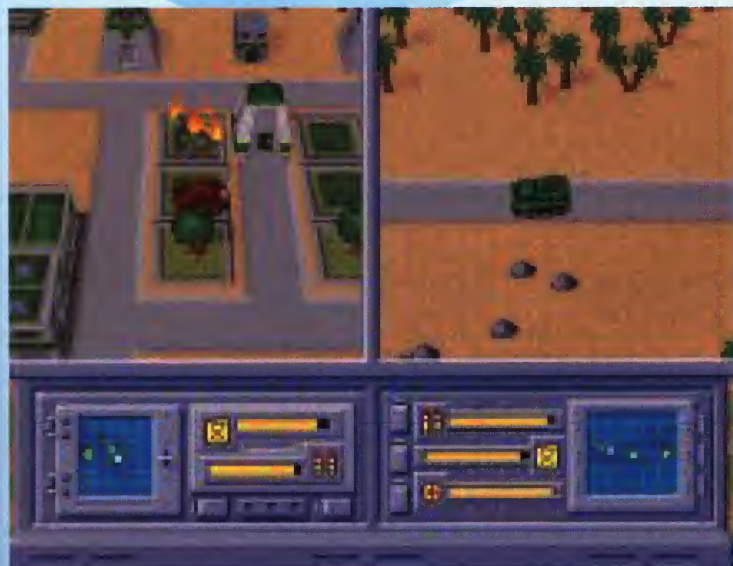
Official modern-day updates of classic arcade games have a bad reputation – and rightly so, because most of them are atrocious hack jobs which glue a much-loved brand name onto a rotten game which has nothing in common with its supposed ancestor.

Crazy Climber 2000, however (a Japan-only PlayStation release, one of many sequels to arcade *Crazy Climber* which Western gamers were never allowed to play), does exactly what an update should do. It leaves the core gameplay intact, but brings the presentation into the modern age. So *CC2000* brings you the same climb-a-skyscraper-while-the-inhabitants-try-to-kill-you action as the 20-year-old original, but depicted in 3D graphics. This means the building rotates smoothly as you shuffle from side to side to avoid the hail of household implements hurled at you by hacked-off householders, tumbling girders, lethal electrical cables snaking from neon signs and, of course, King Kong.

Still one of the quirkiest and most addictive games ever to come out of Japan's 1980s arcade industry, *Crazy Climber* and the PlayStation's graphics chips were made for each other.

LINKS

www.epsxe.com – download ePSXe PlayStation emulator



OK, *Return Fire* doesn't look like much...



Martin Walfisz,
CEO, Massive Entertainment

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Lately I've been playing *Mafia* (I didn't have time to play it when it was released) and some *Warcraft III*. I mostly play PC games, but two console favourites are *Splinter Cell* and *GTA3*.

What was the last videogame you finished?

Call Of Duty – and I thought it was great. I also played *Star Wars: KOTOR* a few months ago, but unfortunately didn't have time to finish it.

What's your favourite game of all time?

This is a really tough question. As a kid, I spent countless hours playing *Boulder Dash* on the Commodore 64. However, in the last few years I've probably spent most time with *Diablo I* and *II*. From a game design perspective, I'm constantly amazed at how the gameplay mechanics constantly make you want to play more and more.

What are you most proud of in your career?

That's easy – founding Massive and leading the team here through both good and bad times. There's been a few times when things have been really shaky, but with hard work and the great commitment from everyone at the company, we've always managed to come out on top.

Who do you most admire in the gaming industry and why?

There are many people in the industry who are worthy of admiration. However, the talented people at Blizzard always end up on the top of my list. Their dedication to quality and ability to always get it right is amazing.

What's your company's philosophy?

We want to create the best games in the world and we have the skills and opportunity to create the best games in the world, so we will! We also want everyone here to combine fun, passion and hard work to excel at their skills.

What's the best thing about your job?

Although my title and position have stayed the same, the environment I work in has changed continuously – almost every year has provided a completely new experience. In addition, working with skilled people and trying really hard to make a great game together is extremely satisfying.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Every time communication between people within a team doesn't work. It happens daily and it's always so frustrating (even more so when it's my mistake).

What are you working on at the moment?

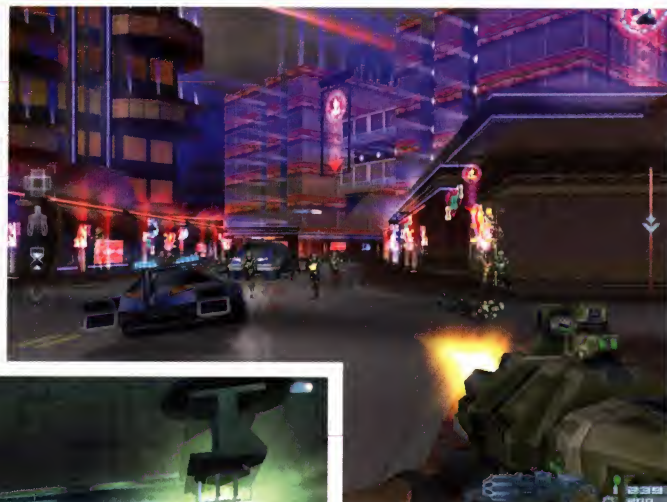
Ground Control II is due to go alpha, so I'm still overseeing the project to make sure we deliver a great gaming experience in time. I'm also involved in discussing the marketing and launch plans for the game, so it's pretty hectic right now.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Besides *Ground Control II* (of course), it must be *Half-Life 2*. If the gameplay mechanics based on real physics and human facial emotions work out well, it'll be a very interesting game experience. I can't wait.



Quiet for a Saturday morning...



Slough circa 2120.



Sabotain mixes blasting with RPG à la Deus Ex.



Moulinex makes things simple.

I FOUGHT THE LAW...

AKELLA'S FUTURISTIC FPS SABOTAIN: BREAK THE RULES

EXCLUSIVE!

RUSSIAN publisher Akella has just picked up the rights to sci-fi blaster/role-player *Sabotain: Break the Rules* – and *PC ZONE* has just acquired these brand-new never-seen-before screenshots. The bizarrely-named neon-soaked FPS takes place in a future where a civil war is raging between the two main powers of the Empire and the Confederation.

"At a basic level the game has a 'secret agent saves the galaxy from a terrible war' storyline," says Akella's PR manager Alexander Shcherbakov. "However, the developer Avalon Style has also included an immense and sophisticated design for city environments, along with an enormous and immersing multi-branching storyline with dozens of non-player characters. And you can drive futuristic hover-cars!"

You get to choose from two player characters: a tough, wise-cracking male commando known as Kent Reed and sultry and intelligent female assassin, Alex Keeton. The RPG element of *Sabotain* involves a set of combat and weapons skills, along with other attributes you have to manage, such as endurance, health and strength. There's a real mish-mash of over 150 enemies you'll encounter in the 17 missions, such as aliens, zombies, robot-guards and daytime TV presenters (just kidding). Fortunately, you're backed



Goodbye Lara Croft. Hello Alex Keeton.

up with over 25 types of heavy weaponry including a four-barrelled shotgun and a laser machine gun.

Although there are no plans for multiplayer games, *Sabotain* will have the latest ragdoll physics so you'll be able to see the limbs of your computer-controlled foes twist, crumple and contort when they're shot which is always nice. Expect more info on *Sabotain: Break the Rules* before the game's release in the spring.

■ Publisher: Akella
■ Developer: Avalon Style
■ ETA: Q2 2004
■ Website: www.akella.com

Sweet Dreams

DREAMCATCHER GAMES ANNOUNCES ITS 2004 PC LINE-UP

IF YOU'RE a regular reader of *PC ZONE*, you'll know all about DreamCatcher's violently entertaining first-person shooter *Painkiller* (check out the demo on our cover discs). Now, along with The Adventure Company, the publisher has revealed it's got a collection of other potential goodies in the pipeline.

Dungeon Lords is the brainchild of DW Bradley (Wizardry VII: Crusaders Of The Dark Savant and Wizards & Warriors) and his company Heuristic Park, who plan to combine innovative third-person 3D combat with RPG elements. Battles are fought in real-time, with the ability to decide when to cast spells, block an attack and other actions depending on your hero's character skills.

Besieger (first revealed back in issue 124) is a medieval fantasy RTS with a storyline featuring two rival races, the Vikings and the Cimmerians, each with their own unique buildings and units. Russian developer Primal Software also promises 12 huge photo-realistic levels with terrain damage-modelling, hundreds of characters and a variety of multiplayer modes for up to 16 players.

Also to be released via DreamCatcher later this year is *SuperPower 2*, a strategy game with the objective of becoming the



Dungeon Lords: rule the underworld.

ruler of the world through political influence, general sneakiness and the handy addition of god-like powers.

Meanwhile, The Adventure Company is planning to launch a raft of adventure titles (what a surprise), with *Egypt 3: The Fate Of Ramses*, *Atlantis Evolution*, *Law & Order*, *Evany* and finally, *Schizm II*, the sequel to a French game that we gave a not-very-good 15 per cent to back in issue 118. Check out the websites for more details.



Atlantis Evolution: rule the waves.



Schizm II: rule the French.



SuperPower 2: rule the world.

- **Publisher:** DreamCatcher Games
- **Developers:** Heuristic Park (*Dungeon Lords*), Primal Software (*Besieger*), GolemLabs (*SuperPower 2*)
- **ETA:** 2004
- **Website:** www.dreamcatchergames.com
www.tacgames.com

GOBLIN UTD VS ORC ROVERS?

FUTURE SPORT FANTASY MAYHEM IN CHAOS LEAGUE



Like an RTS, you can give group orders to characters.



Martin Keown goes in for a tough tackle.

FORGET football and rugby – there's a new and uniquely tough ball game sweeping the fantasy world. *Chaos League* is a RTS/sports sim from French developer Cyanide (also making *Pro Rugby Manager 2004*, see p23) that sees teams of orcs, goblins, elves and seven other races competing in brutal ten-minute matches in a bid to win the coveted championship trophy.

"Your chosen team will start at the lowest level, but as they progress they'll get experience points and new abilities," says producer Patrick Pligersdorffer. "This RPG element is very addictive – you'll find

yourself wanting just one more game so that your linebacker can gain a level and a devastating fireball spell, for example."

Before a match, each team is awarded a small amount of cash that you can spend on nasty stuff such as bribing the referee, recruiting hooligans to wind up the crowd or doping players. Each of the ten races have very different strengths and tactics: elves are fast and good at the passing game but are really poor fighters, whereas the dwarves are slow but strong and try to bully you on the ground.

There are also two star players in each race – the David Beckhams of the

underworld – who have better ratings and special abilities such as powerful spells.

"I wanted to smash my PC the other day when my star minotaur died in a game after he'd managed to kill three opposing players," adds Patrick. A publisher is yet to be confirmed for *Chaos League*, but Cyanide reckons the game will launch in the summer – more soon.

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer:** Cyanide
- **ETA:** Q2 2004
- **Website:** www.cyanide-studio.com



SHORTS



CHAMP MAN 5

UK publisher Eidos has announced the new developer of its lucrative *Championship Manager* franchise. Beautiful Game Studios (geddit?) has been given the tough task of replacing the original developer Sports Interactive, who recently left Eidos to create a rival football manager title to be released through Sega (see page 8). *Champ Man 5*, meanwhile, promises to offer more accurate data and faster loading times.

THE LEGEND DIES



Legend Entertainment, the US developer of *Unreal II: The Awakening*, has been closed down. French publisher Atari shut down the studio immediately after it completed work on the excellent *Unreal II XMP* multiplayer expansion. Although no reason for the closure has been given by Atari, the company is known to have financial troubles – recently 20 per cent was wiped from the value of its shares after the eagerly awaited *Driv3r* slipped from spring to summer.

EA BIG PROFITS



In stark contrast to Atari's fortunes, Electronic Arts has just announced massive profits for the three months before Christmas. Net income for the quarter was \$392 million (£215 million), a 57 per cent increase from the same period last year. Sales were driven by the Christmas success of *Need For Speed: Underground*, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King*, *FIFA Football 2004* and, of course, *The Sims*.

XPLOSIV WINNERS

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Congratulations to the winners of our Xplosiv compo. First prize of a year's supply of Xplosiv games goes to Rob Laidler, Plymouth. Five runners-up prizes of seven Xplosiv games go to: Bob McVie, Fife; SH Rigby, Doncaster; E Hastie, Colne; Allan Nicol, Forfar; Stephen Edmonds, Milton Keynes.

LA RIOT

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA CONFIRMED FOR PC – FIRST SCREENSHOTS REVEALED!



Nick Kang tracked down one man who bought Michelle McManus's single.

ALREADY A smash on console, action driving game *True Crime: Streets Of LA* will now be ramraiding onto PC later this year. Set in 240 square miles of realistic 3D Los Angeles, *True Crime* stars tough Elite Operations Division member Nick Kang, who is slowly drawn into a vicious gang war between the Chinese triads and the Russian mafia.

Very much inspired by Rockstar's *GTA* series, *True Crime* keeps the open-ended mission-based driving gameplay, but improves the on-foot

sections with motion-captured John Woo-style martial arts fighting and arcade-style shoot-outs.

True Crime also has a stunning cast of Hollywood voice talent including Gary Oldman and Christopher Walken, plus an original hip-hop soundtrack of over 50 tunes performed by West Coast rap artists such as Boo-Yaa Tribe, Warren G and Snoop Dogg, who is also an unlockable character in the game.

In addition, the PC version will have online and LAN modes for up to four players, who can



True Crime will be online for PC.



Everybody was kung-fu fighting. Apparently.

join in five games involving street racing, criminal catching/killing and hand-to-hand combat with new weapons including a rocket launcher and crossbow. We'll be bringing you a hands-on report of *True Crime: Streets Of LA* next month. Watch this space.

- Publisher: Activision
- Developer: Luxoflux
- ETA: Q2 2004
- Website: www.activision.com

Bin Bin Laden

EXCLUSIVE! INTERVIEW AND IMAGES FROM AMERICA'S 10 MOST WANTED

WE GOT HIM! After searching for many months, *PC ZONE* tracked down Mark Cale, president of developer/publisher System 3, in his makeshift hole-in-the-ground for the lowdown on forthcoming shooter/beat 'em up hybrid *America's 10 Most Wanted*.

"Your mission is to capture wanted criminals, gangsters and terrorists," said Mark, as we struggled to shine a torch into his mouth. "Most importantly, however, the object of the exercise is to capture them alive. When you find the enemies, the game goes into a combat mode similar to that of *Virtua Fighter*."

Missions begin with you being dropped in a chosen location by helicopter, before

you have to sneak and shoot your way past various obstacles and heavy enemy fire to locate the hidden fugitive. Fortunately, you'll be armed to the teeth with the most lethal hardware the US military machine can supply, including rocket launchers, grenades and AK-47 machine guns.

However, is the actual idea of the game insensitive? Especially as it uses actual CNN footage... "What's key about our game is that it takes its inspiration from the impact of terrorism on today's international community," shouted Mark over the noise of the electric shaver removing his beard. "Saddam Hussein and

Osama Bin Laden are captured alive, rather than killed. The CNN footage is included to add a sense of realism to the game."

We'll bring you more exclusive info on *America's 10 Most Wanted* once we manage to get Mark out of Guantanamo Bay...

- Publisher: System 3
- Developer: System 3
- ETA: Q3 2004



It's all done in the best possible taste.



SLAPHEAD ASSASSIN

FIRST PC SCREENSHOTS OF IO INTERACTIVE'S *HITMAN: CONTRACTS*



Hitman: Contracts enables you to complete missions in sneaky and violent ways. And there's no chance of your hair making a distracting rustling noise.

THE BALD psychopathic contract killer is back for his third sneak-and-snipe adventure – and we've got the first hi-res images. *Hitman: Contracts* begins with the genetically engineered Agent 47 wounded and hunted in Paris, before embarking on a 12-level murderous trek across the world, taking in Romania, Siberia and good old Blighty.

IO Interactive is again developing the title, although the company will this time be hoping to avoid the controversy surrounding the last game that saw the Sikh community outraged at a level that took place at one of their most sacred temples. There'll be new close-combat weapons including a pool cue and a rather grisly meat hook, and new killer moves including

suffocation, impaling and drowning – fun for all the family.

"Keeping the first- and third-person perspectives was a must," says senior producer Neil Donnell. "The game is about freedom in approach, so the viewpoint is the first thing that you have to allow people to choose between."

Hitman: Contracts also promises vastly improved graphics with motion-

blur, dynamic weather effects and spectacular explosions, as well as improved ragdoll physics, real-time lighting and destructible scenery. We'll have a full preview next month.

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: IO Interactive
- ETA: April
- Website: www.hitmancontracts.com

Heaven or Hell?

ENIGMA'S BIZARRE CHERUB 'EM UP ANGELS VS DEVILS



You can customise your characters with silly clothing and accessories.

THE ETERNAL struggle of good versus evil has been turned into bizarre action game *Angels Vs Devils*. It's been created by Spanish developer Enigma, previously responsible for the utterly ridiculous *Hello Kitty Football Cup 2002*.

The third-person game involves you taking sides with the cute cherubs or nasty devils, then battling your enemy in a campaign packed with various single-player and multiplayer mini-games. These include Annihilation (deathmatch) and Steal the Symbol (squad-based Capture the Flag).

Angels Vs Devils also has a strong RPG element where you can customise your unearthly armies with characteristics including strength, agility and speed. There are 270 magic objects to collect and 20 special good and evil powers, including firing balls of celestial energy at foes and protecting yourself with an infernal shield. No news yet on a UK publisher being brave (or stupid) enough to take on this unique title, but Enigma hopes to be releasing the game before the summer.

- Publisher: TBC
- Developer: Enigma
- ETA: TBC
- Website: www.enigmasp.com/avsd/



"We've learnt to double-check things a bit more, as well as staying as far away from religion as possible."

Neil Donnell, senior producer on *Hitman: Contracts*, about causing offence to the Sikh community in the last game. A shoot-out involving the Archbishop of Canterbury has now been scrapped.

"The way information is dealt with in Tomb Raider influenced the way I started thinking about motion pictures."

Film director Gus Van Sant talking to BBCi about his new movie *Elephant*, which does not, however, feature a large-breasted female adventurer hanging from ledges, shooting bats and stealing treasure.

"I told Harvey Smith, the game's project director, to give me ulcers – you know, to make decisions that would make me scream. And he did. And some of them ended up working, and some of them didn't. And I'm not going to tell you which is which!"

Pass the Gaviscon – Ion Storm's studio director Warren Spector on the development of *Deus Ex: Invisible War*.

IndieZone

Dragging the world of underground developers kicking and screaming into the limelight

AS ALERT READERS will have noticed, here at *PC ZONE* we've been devoting quite a bit of attention recently to independent developers, that endangered species representing the last link to the legendary days of the 'bedroom coder'. But after the big feature in issue 137, we got to thinking: what's the use of us bigging-up indie developers if we never look at the indie scene for the rest of the year? And therefore – welcome to Indie Zone.

Every month, we'll be reviewing games from indie developers/publishers that, in most cases, you won't be able to buy in shops, only direct from the authors. They'll be judged by the same standards as any other game – no special treatment for being independent – and hopefully we'll find you a few gems hidden away down a different road from the somewhat generic FPS, RTS, RPG and football release schedules of the majors. On with the show...

FREE PLAY

Super Mario Pac

(Hermit Games)

ONE OF THE REASONS videogaming culture gets so little respect in the real world is that it has so few examples of self-referential cross-pollination like this. *Super Mario Pac* spans three entire generations of gaming: it takes the basic game design of classic Spectrum title *Jetpac*, the setting and aesthetics of seminal SNES platformer *Super Mario World* (by Nintendo, who would later go on to buy part of Rare, the company who made *Jetpac*), and the core gameplay mechanic of the GameCube's *Mario Sunshine*. It then melds all these together into a slick and professional piece of PC freeware. It's practically a historical document.

But as well as all that, it also happens to be a fab little game. Adding a few simple tweaks to the *Jetpac* gameplay brings *Super Mario Pac* right into the world of the Mushroom Kingdom, to the extent that you could easily picture this game being given away with future *Mario* titles on the Game Boy Advance – just like the original *Mario Bros* is nowadays. We like.

URL www.hermitgames.com/mariopac.php – Instructions (should you need them), high score table and more freeware by the same authors.



You can also use your water-pack as a weapon. Madam.



"What idiot left that lying there?"

KAYAK EXTREME

■ \$14.99 | Pub: Small Rockets | Dev: Small Rockets |
ETA: Out now | www.smallrockets.com

REQUIRES PII 233, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card

DESIRES PII 450, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

The thrill of life on the river – but is it oars of fun or a pile of kayak? Stuart Campbell gets wet

IN SEVERAL WAYS, *Kayak Extreme* typifies what independent development is all about. A fairly sedate and technical game about downhill canoeing, it's hard to imagine any major publisher ever greenlighting it. But that doesn't mean it's been produced to lesser standards than the average High Street PC game – as you can see from the picture, the graphics are beautiful and the turbulent streams you paddle down highly convincing.

Where the game lets itself down, though, is in a needlessly complex control system. It has a messy, unintuitive and non-reconfigurable keyset, along with a pace that may be realistic, but seems a little ponderous when you don't have the excitement of real showers of icy spray crashing into your face and the constant threat of drowning after having your head caved in by rocks.

Still, the PC gaming market is one where people tend to lap up relatively dull and accurate simulations in preference to exaggerated arcade thrills, so if the idea of *Kayak Extreme* appeals to you, the execution may well also. To Indie Zone, however, it seems like something of a missed opportunity.



You'll come to loathe red 'reverse' gates.

PCZONE VERDICT 55

Not nearly extreme enough

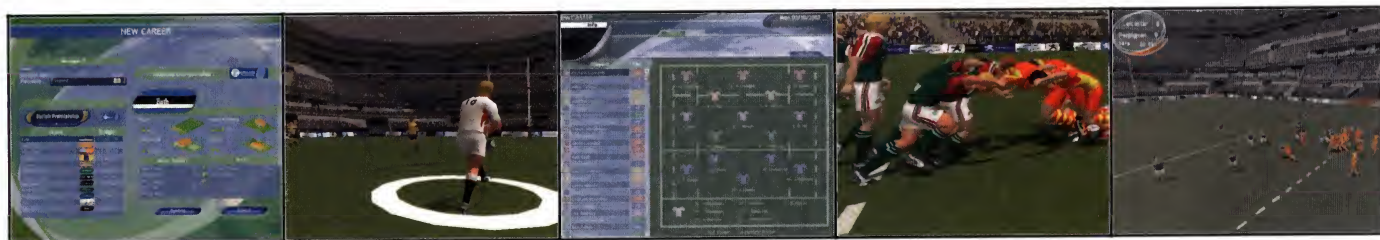
Be prepared to take the knocks on your way to the top



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for more info visit www.prorugbymanager.com

Published in the United Kingdom by Digital Jesters Ltd., developed by Cyanide Studio.
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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

THE FBI has joined the search for the stolen *Half-Life 2* code. **San Francisco** programmer **Chris Toshok** claims that gun-wielding **Federal Agents** from the **Bureau Of Investigation** beat on his door at 6:30am, and **seized** an array of hardware and software, including several computers, plastic containers, CDs, hard drives and cables. Toshok's landlord was also forced to dress at **gunpoint**, although neither of them put up a **violent struggle**, perhaps due to the hypothetical threat of a **severe beating** about the head and neck. Toshok was questioned regarding his involvement with a group of **boffins** known as **The Hungry Programmers**, with whom he previously shared a house. The investigation continues.

Meanwhile, **Doom** creator **John Romero** has found time in between making **mobile phone** games to marry a **teenager** in a **secret** ceremony in her home country of **Romania**. The hirsute has-been bragged: "We're very happy and the next step is to get Rhaluka sorted with her visa so she can finally move here to San Diego. I hope it doesn't take long!" **Rhaluka Romero** blushed: "Since me and John got together in September we've seen each other for less than **three weeks** – the rest of the time we've been talking with each other every day. Maybe for some people it seems easy, but for me it's not! Being with John is the **greatest thing** for me – I've never got along with someone the way I get along with John. We seem **made for each other** because we understand each other so well. I love everything about John!" It seems both our John and our Rhaluka are **loved-up big style**, cupid's aim being true once more. Ah, young love. Very young, as it happens...

Finally, it's been revealed that development on **Championship Manager 05** will be headed up by none other than **Steve Screech**. The man responsible for **Kick Off 2002** once claimed that **PC ZONE** freelancer **Steve Hill** was in the pay of original **Championship Manager** developer **Sports Interactive**, and even **disgracefully relished** in the fact that he had received a career-threatening **injury**. Hill was unavailable for comment due to uncontrollable laughter.

"Doom creator John Romero has married a teenager in a secret ceremony in her home country of Romania"

WOTTA LOTTA TOCA

15 MOTORSPORTS IN ONE GAME? THAT'S TOCA RACE DRIVER 2



Should've taken the slip road, eh?



Like Southend seafront on a Saturday night.

NOW THIS is racing. Belting a series of powerful supercars around incredibly detailed courses, skidding around corners, smashing into rivals at ridiculous speeds and seeing windows smash, metal crumple and debris spin off onto the track.

After our exclusive play in issue 138, Codemasters has again acquired the

TOCA licence for the ambitious *Race Driver 2*, a game that promises to deliver 15 different kinds of motorsport including Stockcar racing, Rally Cross and Super Truck events. Star of the last game – annoying American Ryan McKane – has been booted off the winner's podium, to be replaced by FMV and action played out in first-person, effectively making you the centre of attention.

The preview code is hugely entertaining, with 35 widely different vehicles, believable competitor AI and the new Terminal Damage engine that affects handling. The game will also be fully online this time around, with player rankings and buddy/exclusion lists. Believe us – this could be *Gran Turismo* with more gameplay variety and the addition of fantastic crash damage. Definitive review next issue.



Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Codemasters
ETA: April
Website: www.codemasters.co.uk/tocaracedriver

Odd-shaped Balls

JONNY WILKINSON AND CHUMS IN PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2004



Recreate those World Cup glories with *Pro Rugby Manager 2004*.



"Can anyone see my contact lens?" Huge Polo causes match havoc.

UK PUBLISHER Digital Jesters is capitalising on England's World Cup success by releasing *Pro Rugby Manager 2004*. Designed by Cyanide Studios (who developed the *Cycling Manager* series), the game comes packed with over 100 clubs, 50 national teams and 15,000 real players, who'll compete in various championships including the Six Nations, Super 12 and World Cup.

As well as managing your team by training squads, buying and selling players and balancing the books, a fully 3D real-time match engine enables you to change tactics on-the-fly and make vital match-saving substitutions. There's also multiplayer modes that enable you to challenge other fans of the sport, with an online ladder ranking the best rugger-buggers. Find out if *Pro Rugby Manager 2004* is worth a 'try' with next month's review. Ahem.

Publisher: Digital Jesters
Developer: Cyanide Studios
ETA: March
Website: www.digitaljesters.com

Champions Of Europe

EA SECURES UEFA EURO 2004 LICENCE – FIRST SCREENSHOTS!



Thierry Henry's football skills now include levitation.

STOP THE PRESS! Yes, surprise, surprise – EA is planning to release a new game to tie-in with this summer's feast of football in Portugal. In *UEFA Euro 2004*, you'll be able to play as one of 51 European teams in the qualifying rounds, play-offs and the actual tournament.

Along with tracking suspensions and injuries through the competition, a

'dynamic morale system' has been added that will mean players' morale will change for the better or worse, depending on their performances and team results.

In addition, there'll be the usual excellent quality presentation that EA is renowned for, with big-name music acts, proper kits and player names – and even more lifelike representations of



Welsh player in bamboozled shocker.



Turn, aim, shoot!

the famous footballers and stadia.

Plus, if your team missed out on the main competition, this is also your chance to right those wrong results (at least in the virtual world), erasing painful memories such as Scotland's miserable 5-0 drubbing by Holland.

■ **Publisher:** EA
■ **Developer:** EA Canada
■ **ETA:** Q2 2004
■ **Website:** www.easports.com

Good Cop. Bad Cop.



GOOD COP

Far Cry. Have you played the huge demo yet? You haven't? Do I know you?

Preparations for the biggest games show of the year are already underway – E3 2004 in Los Angeles, May 12-14. Expect a raft of huge announcements from id, Valve, Rockstar and other big-hitters in just a few months...

Machinima. Spielberg? Finished. Check out our special report on page 12.

The return of Sports Interactive to footie management games. Check out our exclusive First Look on page 8.

BAD COP

After five years of loyal service, Martin Korda will no longer be a full-time staff member of **PC ZONE**. However, the bear-baiter from Bratislava will still be writing for us on a regular basis, if he can tear himself away from daytime TV repeats of *The A-Team*.



Leeds United's terminal decline sending Rent-a-Northerner Sefton into paroxysms of anger followed by loud moans of despair. Sad, sad, sad.

Good Cop: **Michael Knight** (David Hasselhoff)
Bad Cop: **Garth Knight** (David Hasselhoff) (both from TV's *Knight Rider*) – suggested by Dawn Hutchison, Southampton. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a **PC ZONE** goodie-bag!

COMPETITION

PCZONE GAMES JOURNALIST COMPETITION!

Win a PAID commission to write for the world's best PC games mag!

Have you got the throbbing Mekon-like brain of Paul Presley, the raw Slovakian brawn of Martin Korda or the tea-making, butt-of-all-jokes capability of Will Porter? Well, this month we're launching a nationwide competition to find the brightest, wittiest and funniest new PC games reviewer in the UK!

All you have to do to stand a chance of winning a commission for *PC ZONE* is write a 500-word critique of a recent PC game, plus a 200-word piece on what YOU think of the state of PC gaming today.

The person who sends us the best entry will receive a paid (yes, real money!) commission for a preview or review of a top PC game, to be published in the magazine, plus the opportunity for more work as a professional games journalist. The five runners-up will each receive subscriptions to *PC ZONE*.

If you've always wanted to be the next Steve Hill, then we could make your twisted dreams come true! Send entries to:

PC Zone Games Journo Compo,
9 Dallington Street,
London EC1V 0BQ

Closing date is April 1 2004. For terms and conditions see page 7.

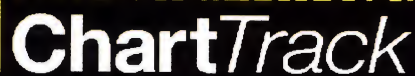


You could soon be reviewing games like *Doom 3*.

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it



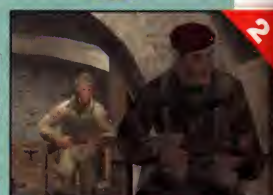


The Sims are top of the charts again. And at number three. And number four. And number five. And, marvel of marvels, they're at number six too. Cor blimey! Good God! Stone the crows! It's enough to make us here at PC ZONE weep. Buckets.



Proof, if it were needed, that the public are a bunch of fools. *Total Club Manager* is a piss-poor game on its own, but when placed in the shadow of the almighty *Champ Man* series, it pales into insignificance. Still, the customer's always right. Right?

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	▲ THE SIMS	EA	86%
2	▲ CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION	94%
3	▼ THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	EA	55%
4	– THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA	67%
5	▲ THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA	59%
6	▲ THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA	78%
7	▲ TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA	48%
8	▲ LOTR: WAR OF THE RING	VU GAMES	73%
9	RE KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION	94%
10	▼ EMPIRES: DAWN OF MODERN WORLD	ACTIVISION	83%



At least some sanctity and goodness can be leeches from the charts: *Call Of Duty* is still doing us proud. We've used a dictionary's worth of superlatives praising the WWII shooter, and it seems a fair number of people are spending their cash wisely.



BioWare's *Star Wars* gem reclaims its steady position near the foot of the top ten, showing there's life yet in the battle against FPS/Sims games yet. We hope that gamers everywhere will someday be able to relish in *KOTOR*'s greatness. Spread the good word.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Lots of war and Sims titles. *The Sims: Livin' Luftwaffe* looks to be an inevitability.
funkindemup

I can only pray that someone, somewhere, will steal *The Sims 2* source code.
Rich

Let's have a comparison: flick back to issue 108. *The Sims* was still in the charts and people were wondering why, and *Half-Life* was the best FPS ever made. Not much has changed, has it?
Chaos59



megastores

TOP 10

COMPETITION



megastores

1. FIFA FOOTBALL 2004	EA
2. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS + UNDRENTIDE PACK	ATARI
3. HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
4. CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
5. LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING	EA
6. URU: AGES BEYOND MYST	UBISOFT
7. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS
8. MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR
9. PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBISOFT
10. TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10 (see left, and try not to drool). All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: In *Neverwinter Nights*, what is it that's killing off all the poor NPCs?

Send your answers on a postcard to:

PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 140, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: March 30, 2004

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE COMING MONTHS. THESE ARE ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES, CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

MARCH

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
BREED	CDV
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04	CODEMASTERS
CONAN	TDK MEDIACTIVE
COUNTER STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	VU GAMES
DEAD MAN'S HAND	ATARI
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
DRAKE	VU GAMES
FAR CRY	UBISOFT
KILL SWITCH	LSP GAMES
LORD OF THE REALMS III	VU GAMES
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
POOL PARADISE	IGNITION
PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2004	DIGITAL JESTERS
TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS
TOM CLANCY'S RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD	UBISOFT
SONIC ADVENTURE DX DIRECTOR'S CUT	SEGA
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI

APRIL

DESERT RATS VS. AFRIKA KORPS	DIGITAL JESTERS
HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE: INFERNAL CRUSADE	TDK MEDIACTIVE
SACRED	ASCARON
SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE	DEEP SILVER

Q1

CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER: FRANCHISE EDITION	SEGA
PERIMETER	CODEMASTERS
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI

Q2

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	ATARI
SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII	CODEMASTERS
UEFA EURO 2004	EA
WARLORDS: BATTLECRY III	ENLIGHT

Q3

DAWN OF WAR	THQ
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
JUICED	ACCLAIM
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	EIDOS
SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE	ACTIVISION
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

Q4

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BLOODRAYNE 2	VU GAMES
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
FAHRENHEIT	VU GAMES
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION
THE MATRIX ONLINE	UBISOFT
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES

REST OF 2004

AXIS & ALLIES	ATARI
BLOWOUT	VU GAMES
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DUNGEON SIEGE 2	MICROSOFT
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
SID MEIER'S PIRATES	ATARI
TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA	ACTIVISION
ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY	EA
WARHAMMER ONLINE	SEGA

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

MYTHICA

A SAD DAY for Vikings. Microsoft's promising Norse mythology-based alternative to *EverQuest 2* has dropped out of the MMOG race following a "careful evaluation of the competitive landscape". Sounds like the multi-billion dollar publisher is running scared if you ask us. Shame.

- Publisher: Microsoft
- Developer: Microsoft
- ETA: KIA



MOH: PACIFIC ASSAULT



EA RECENTLY let slip that two of its most hyped releases are going to be kept in captivity for a mite longer than any of us expected. First up, *Pacific Assault* won't be seeing daylight until the beginning of EA's 2005 fiscal year. Which, to plebs like you and me, means anytime after July.

- Publisher: EA
- Developer: EA
- ETA: Q3
- Website: www.eagames.com

THE SIMS 2

ALONG WITH with the news of *Pacific Assault*'s extra tweaking time, it seems *The Sims 2* is going to be similarly tardy. Whether this is a good or bad thing (EA can probably pump out a good two or three extra *Sims* expansion packs in the meantime) is as yet undetermined.

- Publisher: EA
- Developer: EA
- ETA: Q3
- Website: www.thesims2.ea.com



US TOP 10

1. CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
2. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
3. THE SIMS: DELUXE	EA
4. THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	EA
5. ZOO TYCOON: COMPLETE COLLECTION	MICROSOFT
6. THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA
7. THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
8. THE SIMS: VACATION	EA
9. MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT	MICROSOFT
10. LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING	EA



ROME: TOTAL WAR

Behold! The best strategy game of the year approaches...

ROME wasn't built in a day, a week, a month or even a year. In fact, it's taken around three years for development house The Creative Assembly to get to the incredible scenes of RTS&S (real-time swords and sandals) you see here.

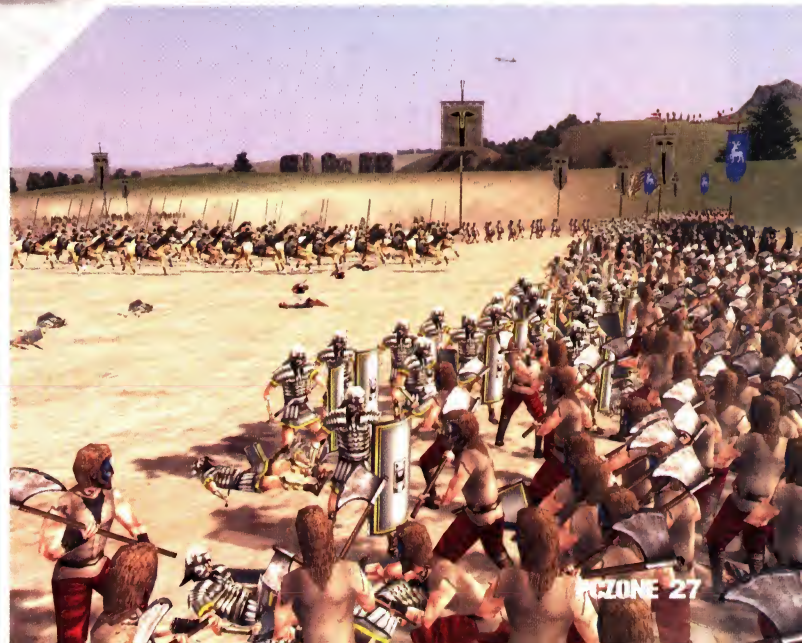
What with more hype being spun these days than silk from the butts of Chinese worms, it's hard to truly believe these images will be played out on your home PC come September. But they will – we've seen them in action. Battles taking place at any time of day or night, terrain that exactly mirrors the strategic map (right down to the smoking volcano in the background) and thousands of

perfectly animated troops – of every race, colour and creed – clashing on a scale and scope hitherto only seen in seriously expensive Hollywood films and our rather overworked imaginations...

We'll stop there or we'll be here all issue. Which would be silly considering we're going to be telling you everything you ever wanted to know about *Rome: Total War* next month in our world exclusive first play – don't miss it!

■ **Publisher:** Activision
■ **Developer:** The Creative Assembly
■ **ETA:** September
■ **Website:** www.totalwar.com





101



ILLUSTRATIONS BLOOM, represented by www.illustrationweb.com

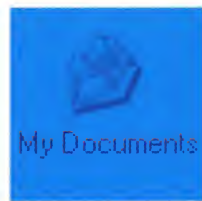
WAYS TO MAKE GAMES BETTER

The last report card for PC games read 'tries hard: could do better'. Here's some suggestions how...

GAMING. It's in a right old state. Clichés abound, bugs are everywhere and sloppy game design plagues us all. When you boil the facts right down to their basic constituents, it's all wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Luckily, we here at PC ZONE are on a mission to make things better again. It's all too easy for us to mock. To

critique. To point the finger of opinion at the button marked 'complain'. Instead, we've decided to set things right. Not just one or two things, mind. That would be easy. Here, for the benefit of us all, are 101 ways to make this hobby we adore a thing of joy once more. After all, if we don't make an effort, who will? Games programmers?



1 Install where we tell you to install rather than spreading yourself over several folders and menus.



2 And put yourself in the Start Menu folder of OUR choice. We couldn't care less what publisher you come from.



3 What is it with loading bars that accelerate, stall, crawl, accelerate and then hang half-an-inch away from completion? Wouldn't it be more reasonable to have a loading bar that indicates (to some degree) how long you're going to have to wait?



4 While we're at it, how about better installation software? No more boring blue bars moving from left to right. Wow us with funky tunes and graphics and that. It's 2004, you know.



5 No, we do not want to peruse the readme file after installation. Not at all. We didn't pay 40 quid for the opportunity to read through several acres of tech specs and apologies for the things that the programmers have bugged up.



6 Never install 'handy' applications and drivers which override existing Windows settings. Everything from Sierra-sponsored calculators to the wrong version of DirectX.



7 Make 'Uninstall Everything' mean EVERYTHING. No left over folders in 'Program Files', no save game files, no .ini, .cfg, or .dat files. You're being removed for a reason.

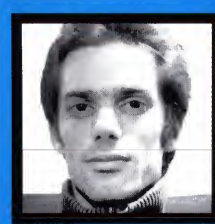


8 And yes, we really do want to quit.

9 Always auto-detect our graphics cards and work out your own bloody levels of mip-mapping, anti-aliasing and vertex shading. We're not the programmers you know, you are.

10 Release games on DVD. Everyone has one now, so why bother releasing KOTOR across half-a-dozen CDs? Disc swapping is so passé.

11 And if you do that, how about DVD extras? Developer interviews, making-of docs, artwork galleries etc? Think out of the box, please.



12 Jonty Barnes, Black & White Studios – "I'd like to see more attention to the core of games and the interface to it. I often see great games spoilt by the player's inability to get past the poorly designed interface. There are games which look fantastic, but the key gameplay lacks the quality, as if it hadn't been given the focus and was reliant on one programmer who just didn't quite get it right."



13 Share more stuff. All around the world, games developers are reinventing the wheel every day. How many times has a tree been modelled? Or the city of San Francisco? Or an AI routine for a monkey? If only there was more sharing of assets, through some simple (royalty-free) industry scheme, the world would be a better place. Development times would shrink, game quality would improve, the industry would flourish and all wars would come to an end. Amen.



14 Shared computers have become miniature war zones over the controversial habit of mouse inversion. Instead of burying the invert mouse option deep within screens and screens of meaningless options, why not just

bind a key to it and be done with it?

15 If you require Windows to run, make proper use of the OS and design your games not to crash if we need to Alt+TAB out for a moment.

16 Or if we press the useless Windows key in some kind of freak mistake.

17 In fact, why not just automatically disable it?



18 Ian Turnbull, Black Cactus – “Thinking time. Very rarely is games development a smooth process. There needs to be predefined evaluation periods throughout a development process,

and yes these periods will cost money, even though little tangible work is being carried out during that time. It's like taking a deep breath and saying: 'Is this right? Is it what we expected? Should we modify what we're doing?'”



20 Bring back FMVs. Simple, to the point.

21 But make them skippable. Without exception. Any that aren't should be sued for crimes against humanity. The European Convention of Human Rights should look into this as soon as possible.

22 And make them pausable, rewindable and replayable at will too. You spent millions on them. You might as well let us enjoy them.

23 Always use proper actors for the voices. Don't just get the Doris from reception to do the obligatory distended female voice. And nobody is convinced by West Country gangsters.

24 Mr T should be in more games.

25 Tim Curry hasn't been in a shit FMV-based adventure for years. Someone get him out of retirement. Pronto.

26 Get proper writers to write the scripts, too. If the actors are going to stand a chance of making their lines sound believable, the lines themselves need to be convincing in the first place.

27 Tread carefully when attempting humour. Bad comedy is worse than no comedy.

28 Designers: get over the fact that you're a failed film director. Just because your sandwich course at Leicester Polytechnic didn't lead to Hollywood, stop trying to turn games into films.

29 Only employ professional musicians. Having shelled out 30 quid, nobody wants to hear a track that your mate laid down on his Bontempi organ. It's an embarrassing charade that cheapens us all.

19 Exactly what perks do we get when we register our game with a publisher's website? Love? Respect? Virility and the ability to inspire awe and wonder in the opposite sex? Or my details being fed into the turning cogs of the capitalist machine and spat out on the other side in the form of junk email, duff offers and faceless money-grabbing? Stop wasting our time.

“Why not share more? Development times would shrink and game quality would improve”

30 Use plain English! Don't flood us with IP addresses and protocols, USB bus ports and so on. You take care of that stuff behind the scenes. Talk to us in English. Unless we've picked Spanish as our language option, of course.



31 Patrick Buckland, Stainless Games – "Don't try to be clever – it's not you versus your player. You're not trying to outwit them. It just isn't big and clever to hide the only key to the door up the dwarf's

arse where nobody will ever think of looking. At the very least, have the fob dangling out from between his butt cheeks..."



32 Make all the stinking, greedy fat cats running this industry take a 15-year intensive game-playing course to catch up with the rest of us and stop being such blinkered, money-grabbing wankers. Maybe then

they'd stop making crap games for the sake of financial year reports. Rant over.



33 Lose EA's head of 'soccer'. "Twelve individuals working collectively as one team" indeed.



34 Games cost too much money. Especially as some of today's games are over before the cup of tea you made while you were installing it is cold. Hardware costs mean many gamers are strapped for cash.

Lowering prices will raise sales and cut software theft at the same time. Simple, yet effective.



35 Lobby your MPs to push through official government subsidies and investments for games development studios. It works for Korea.

36 Keep accompanying literature to an absolute minimum. If we wanted to read, we'd buy a book.

37 PCs are a pain in the arse for getting games to work properly. Get the gaming and technology companies together at a conference to agree



45 Enough with the post-apocalyptic wastelands. We've all seen *Mad Max*.

46 Don't bring your work to work. Just because you spend all day dicking about with computers, it doesn't mean gamers want to be 'hacking into the mainframe' every five minutes.

47 No more air-conditioning ducts. Every FPS since *Die Hard* has had us crawling through ridiculously spacious air-conditioning systems that could house an entire Guatemalan immigrant family. Go on, be original.

48 The following map environments are hereby banned for five years to life, subject to good behaviour. Dockside warehouses. Airports. Chinatown/streets of Hong Kong. Yakuza hideouts (especially those culminating in helipad boss battles). Hospitals. Sewers. The Louvre (or art galleries in general). Area 51. Strip clubs. Massage parlours. Whorehouses (or any other location pandering to developers' rampant sexual frustration). Any location from *Soldier Of Fortune II*.

49 Some suggested alternatives. Crowded department stores. Ice hockey arenas. Roller discos. Tomato sauce factories. Salvador Dali amusement parks. Scarlett Johansson's pants.

(at gunpoint if necessary) to the same basic format for all. Result: better performing games with no crashes.

38 Seamless level loading – if our Xboxes can do it with an 8GB hard disk and 64MB main memory, why can't our PC?

39 Why must you reload the entire level when we were only playing it 30 seconds ago? There's two gigs of RAM in our graphics cards alone. Not to mention all that virtual memory. Use it.

40 Super-slow fades between menu screens in action games causes high blood pressure and premature death. Sack the guy who codes them.

41 Hackers have already defeated your anti-piracy measures. You won't stop them, so get over it. In the meantime, stop punishing the rest of us with stupidly complicated procedures that only serve to annoy the people who pay your wages.

42 Sometimes we need to pee, eat, go outside and answer the phone. So let us save where we want, when we want. You're only a bloody game after

all and you should be there for our convenience, not the other way round. Or are we missing something?

43 Ditch 'realism'. Real-world games are arguably the most immersive, but you only need to take a quick look at the history of art (or even cinema) to see how small a slice of the visual/imaginative spectrum we've explored in games. *XIII*, *Tron 2.0* and the indie masterpiece *Pencil Whipped* (www.realityfactory.ca/chiselbrain) are steps in the right direction, but the possibilities are truly endless.



44 Tim Ansell, Creative Assembly – "Games could be made better if the designers and everyone involved in a game's conception and creation remembered that they're not just creating

games for people like themselves or a vocal minority. When games appeal to a broader market, they get bigger sales. Which in turn leads to more profit, bigger development budgets, higher production values and a better-quality product."

"People post feedback because they care. If your community is passionate about your game, consider yourself blessed. But if you ignore their opinions, consider yourself damned"

MICHAEL CAPPS, SCION STUDIOS



50 No more crate-filled warehouses packed with exploding barrels. Ever shot a barrel in real life? They don't explode – never have, never will.



51 You shoot one barrel and it blows up. You shoot another and only a small crack appears. Some doors open, some don't, despite looking identical. Try adding some consistency.



52 Don't just stick a great big red button in front of us and expect us to press it – at least give us the impression that we're using our minds to solve the various puzzles.



53 Interactive scenery. Being able to launch a rocket in an FPS at a house full of baddies and bring it tumbling down on top of them. If you give us rockets, we'll want to be able to destroy, maim and mutilate

everything in our path – including buildings.



54 Michael Capps, Scion Studios – "Listen to your community; they're posting their feedback because they care and that's awesome. Heck, every single feature in your game will be hated

by someone. If your community is passionate about your game, consider yourself blessed. But if you ignore their opinions, consider yourself damned."



55 As proved in movies, it's what you don't see that really scares you. Allow us to walk around for more than a few minutes without hordes of demons/assassins/space pirates swarming us constantly.

56 Work on the ragdoll physics. We've not seen many dead bodies up close recently, but we're pretty sure they don't all lose their spinal column when they get shot.



57 Or any whose heads have morphed into solid walls, either.

58 Similarly, we haven't seen many dead bodies floating six inches above the ground.



59 Dead bodies sinking into the landscape may be a necessary trick to keep the frame-rates up, but to see the results of your actions with heaps of corpses littering the place is one of the most gratifying aspects of playing an FPS. In fact, why can't we pick them up, pile them on top of each other and give them a roasting with full honours?



60 Scared soldiers. Sending a group of soldiers into a suicidal attack in an RTS should illicit a "f**k you" response from the speakers.



61 Can we please stop hearing Dorset peasants saying: "With all haste my Lord!" every time we click on them? Just get on with building my temple, thank you.

62 Get the AI basics right. In this day and age, why do some units still go off in the wrong direction and get stuck behind twigs on the floor? And why don't they realise you're there even when you're standing next to them burrowing into their skulls with a drill? Baffling.



63 Knights Templar? Illuminati? Shadow governments? Been there, done that, foiled their evil plans dozens of times already. New bad guys please, developers.



64 And let's have less sci-fi clichés too. Not every alien is thin and grey with reflective almond eyes.



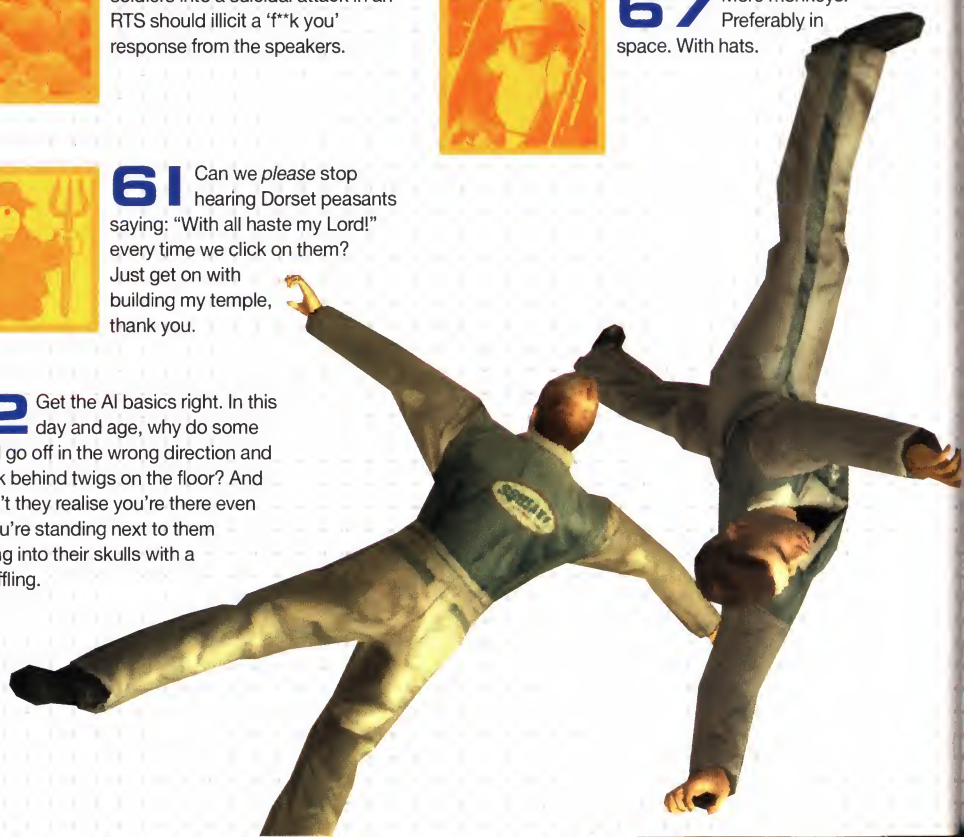
65 Lose the Futuristic Game Random Year Generator. It doesn't matter if it's 2457, 2754 or 27,457. It's not real.



66 That goes for names too. Searching for the Dagger of Th'thaal, in the kingdom of Trithallos and being battered by hordes of Tremogrims and Googosays is not cool. Especially when your character is called Pinkleytharsos. I mean, really...



67 More monkeys. Preferably in space. With hats.



68 Main characters that we can empathise with, as opposed to the annoying bastards that we're occasionally lumbered with. The fact that we laugh when he dies is probably not a good indication of our growing empathy for the character.



69 Alan Bunker, Empire Interactive – "I think we should be investing more time into new gameplay technologies and mechanisms to take gaming to a new level. In particular, I'd like to see

complex voice recognition used widely and as an integral part of the PC game-playing experience. Imagine playing tactical squad-based games and giving orders to your AI controlled team members by voice! Then, if you introduce a sensitivity measure, you'll need to whisper commands when the enemy is just around the corner from you. Talk too loud and you've had it!"



81 MMORPGs are meant to be virtual worlds online. That means we might want to do something other than be forced to kill rodents on an alarmingly regular basis. We get enough mindless repetition at work. Online, we want to be heroes.



70 Having played a fair few games in our time, we know how to crawl. We're aware of the existence of ladders and their many uses. We comprehend the fact that when you point a gun at a target and click your mouse, it goes bang. We no longer need tutorials with a shouty American soldier calling us names while we learn military tactics like 'how to duck' on an obstacle course that my gran could finish.



71 Listen carefully to the sound of a combustion engine. If you can accurately reproduce it, every petrolhead in the world will buy your game.



72 Pay Chris Taylor a million bucks to write the sequel to *Total Annihilation*. You're sure to get at least five million bucks back.



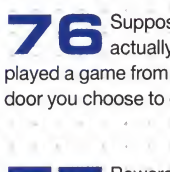
73 Find Warren Spector's long-lost identical twin brother.



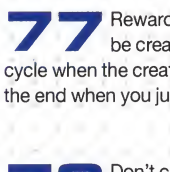
74 More quirky Britishness. *School Tycoon* – it would've been so much better if it was set in a 1930s English Public school, with damn good thrashings and midnight feasts to deal with...



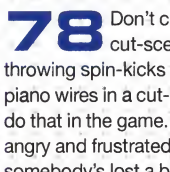
75 More adult themes. And no, we don't mean more *Leisure Suit Larry* adventures. More games reflecting the mature audience that make up the majority of PC gamers. Storylines dealing with unrequited love, jealousy, despair, passion and loss, as well as drugs and violence – you're very welcome.



76 Supposedly freeform game endings should actually be affected by the way you've played a game from the start, and not just by what door you choose to go through on the last level.



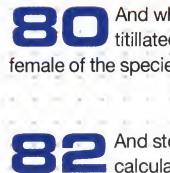
77 Reward us properly. Game endings should be created at the start of the development cycle when the creativity is still running high, not at the end when you just want to get it out the door.



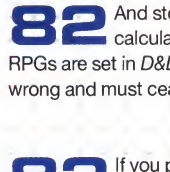
78 Don't create false expectations in cut-scenes. If we see our hero throwing spin-kicks and strangling people with piano wires in a cut-scene, we're going to want to do that in the game. And when we can't, we get angry and frustrated and the next thing you know somebody's lost a bollock.



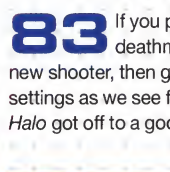
79 More exposed breasts, less restrained cleavage.



80 And what about the ladies? Lara Croft has titillated the male eye for years, but now the female of the species needs something to look at too.



82 And stop trying to be *EverQuest*. By our calculations, over 90 per cent of all online RPGs are set in *D&D*-derived fantasy worlds. This is wrong and must cease.



83 If you plan on including a multiplayer deathmatch-type mode with your spanky new shooter, then give us the tools to adjust the game settings as we see fit. Thick fog, time of day, the works. *Halo* got off to a good start, but we want to go deeper.



84 Doug Lombardi, Valve Software – "I want to be encouraged to finish more of the games I purchase by facing progressively difficult AI opponents. Too many gamers can still cite too many references of hitting the "and then it just got stupidly hard" point in a game – the point at which they stopped playing."



85 More mini-games. We could play pool in *Duke Nukem 3D* – very badly – so why couldn't we play pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey in *Dungeon Siege*? Console games know this – learn the lessons.

86 Speaking of consoles, where's EyeToy PC? Rather than having to use a keyboard, we could crouch in front of our monitors with a big stick, pretending to shoot people.

87 And see others doing it online too.

88 And let us speak to them as well. Voice-over-IP started with PCs. Xbox Live doesn't have the monopoly. Integrate TeamSpeak into all multiplayer games immediately.

89 There's no such thing as a 'PC game' or 'console game'. *Halo*, *Pro Evo* and *Need For Speed: Underground* are living proof of this fact. Please can we have *Metroid Prime* next?

90 In fact, can we just have Nintendo and Sega making games for us as well?



91 Miles Jacobson, Sports Interactive – "To make games better, I think we need to stop worrying about Hollywood presentation and work more on the actual content of the games.

For me, too many games seem to be style over substance nowadays. In saying that, I've always been more of a fan of the Coen Brothers' films than action movies..."

92 We get shot online. We want to know from where, by who and how, or we won't learn anything other than how annoying your level design is.



96 Can we please have an integrated takeaway service in online games? This would mean us never having to pause your game again to order that much needed pizza, Chinese or Indian meal. Preferably

with reduced waiting times too.

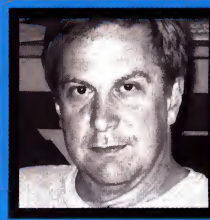


93 Some way of introducing a self-administered PC punishment system that will administer a lethal zap of electricity to any idiot cheating or abusing other players online.

94 Moderated games servers set up solely for people who aren't twats. People could nominate others who they know rarely display signs of online twattism (camping, team-killing, n00b taunting,

cheating, etc) and only they gain access to the golden servers where all players are friendly, noble and good chaps. It would be just like the Masons. Without the evil and unnecessary trouser hitching.

95 I33t names. Ban people with StUp1dFuK1nGn4m3s from playing computer games. Give them a dictionary and dump them on an iceberg.



97 Jay Wilbur, Epic Games – "Keep major features planned for your project under wraps until they're done. I've had the pleasure of working with some of the biggest loudmouths – guys who

couldn't wait to jump up from design meetings to type in a forum or ICQ what was just discussed. That expectation just placed unreasonable and unnecessary stress on the development team."

TOP TEN

▲ TEN BAD IDEAS THAT WILL PROBABLY HAPPEN ANYWAY...

- 1** The return of lens flares – taking visual hindrance to whole new levels.
- 2** A new *Tomb Raider* film.
- 3** A dozen new MMORPGs all set in a land before time, all seeing elves and dwarves kill rats over and over again.
- 4** *Championship Manager* without the Collyer brothers.
- 5** Bullet-time, bullet-time, bullet-time. Reprise.
- 6** *Virtual Rambler* – proving that even last-minute filler jokes aren't safe from creatively dead marketing departments.
- 7** Countless expansions for *The Sims 2*, making a joke of top ten charts everywhere.
- 8** *Kill Bill Karting*.
- 9** *I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here Interactive!*
- 10** *Half-Life 2* announced as an Xbox-exclusive title.

98 More cross-title integration for simulations. Why can't all the EA Sports titles link to a central online hub?



99 Cross-platform too. *FFXI* lets PC owners team up with PS2 role-players, but why can't we shoot Xbox *Halo* owners too? No fair.



100 Don't pick a release date until you're good and ready. We can wait.

101 Stop getting Bond wrong!

PAINKILLER

HEAVEN'S GOT A HITMAN



The next best thing to a well-oiled stake-gun is an NVIDIA GeForce FX graphics processor. Painkiller's got old-school gameplay with the next-generation graphics you're itching for, so you need the right hardware.

NVIDIA. The Way It's Meant To Be Played.



Incredibly Detailed Monsters



Single and Multi-Player



Advanced Physics (Havok™ 2.0)

"There is no doubt Painkiller is already on its way to becoming the biggest hit of 2004" Gamechronicles.com

"This is a serious contender for 2004's top FPS honors" Play Magazine

WWW.PAINKILLERGAME.COM

PC CD-ROM



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www.pegi.info

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Criminal-minded...

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

The sequel to your favourite burglary sim is approaching completion.

Anthony Holden smashes and grabs the latest exclusive info

IF YOU'VE never actually been a thief, just stop right here. Get up off the bog or wherever you're browsing this fine publication, get some suitably inconspicuous duds on and go and nick something. Anything will do – a car, some diamonds, even just a packet of peanuts. If your conscience is bothering you, pick a big high street chain store – they're all run by evil profiteering tossers anyway. When you're done, come back and we'll carry on.

Done...? Terrifying, wasn't it? The paranoia of being watched, the fear of being caught, the tension as you

made off with the goods, your shoulders tingling with the dreadful anticipation of a policeman's glove falling on them like the hand of god. But assuming you didn't get caught, and aren't currently sharing a cell with a hairy, drunken sodomite, how great was it when you got away with it?

If the adrenalin is still pumping through your veins from that experience, you'll understand more than ever why *Thief* is such a great concept. The appeal of being a thief is not the stuff you nick, it's the fact that you get away with it at all. Every time you steal, you outwit your opponents – you take the goods right out from under their noses and better yet, no one even sees you doing it. You're clever, you're invisible, you're better than all the idiots who work

for a living and you'll stab anyone who says otherwise.

HELLO DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND

This month, we were lucky enough to have another furtive peek at the newly renamed stealth 'em up, *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. With the full team once again beaver away on the title (after they were pulled off to get *Deus Ex: Invisible War* out the door), development is proceeding at an alarming rate. "We've already got a complete 'draft' of the game," says Randy Smith, project director of TDS and our guide through the latest build. "You can play through the whole thing from front to back. It's a bit of a shaky first draft, but the potential for an amazing game is very

clear and we've got plenty of time to polish and tune."

He's not kidding either. These new screenshots aren't too shabby, but they really don't do justice to the game and just how far things have progressed since *Thief II*. Indeed, despite being the third in the series, this could well be the game that finally nails the idea of actually being a thief, of becoming the character Garrett, with no lumbering zombies or ridiculous robots to get in the way – just the freedom and tools to be a master criminal in a believable, dynamic universe.

"*Thief: Deadly Shadows* takes things a step further," agrees Randy. "The player has a lot more options, and you also get to be involved more directly in Garrett's life. You'll enter Garrett's house,

"Garrett has a much larger presence in the game and you take a much more direct part in his life"

RANDY SMITH PROJECT DIRECTOR

Another guard about to fail dismally in fulfilling his job spec.

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
130

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ion Storm
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.thief3.com
ETA June 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Some of the smartest, most dynamic enemy AI around
- Hugely interactive world powered by Havok physics
- Open-ended gameplay – find your own path
- Now with both first- and third-person options

CV



ION STORM

The story of Ion Storm is the stuff of games folklore. In 1996, John Romero famously split with id Software to do his own thing, forming Ion Storm and signing with Eidos. His Dallas-based studio produced over-hyped stinker *Daikatana* and quirky RPG *Anachronox* before being shut down in 2001, while a second studio, based in Austin and headed up by industry legend Warren Spector, has rarely set a foot wrong. Here's what that lot have been up to.

2000 *Deus Ex*. The classic role-playing shooter is still one of the finest games ever created.

2003 *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. The rushed-to-market sequel was simplified and vaguely disappointing, but nonetheless great.

2004 *Thief 3*. Ion Storm has managed to reunite many former employees of Looking Glass Studios, where the first two *Thief* games were made. Hopes are high for a truly magnificent sequel.



Semi-detached gothic mansion, some security issues.

meet your fence, sell your loot and go to the black market to buy thieves' tools. You'll be able to make decisions about who Garrett allies with and who he chooses as his enemies. Overall, Garrett has a much larger presence in the game and you take a much more direct part in his life."

THE THIRD MAN

But before we get carried away, we should have a look at what's changed since we last saw the game. Clearly, the biggest change is the new third-person perspective. As much as we like it, we have to ask Randy: was it a pure gameplay decision, or a concession to the broader console audience?

"Ultimately, supporting both first- and third-person as fully as we're doing will

make the *Thief* series more profitable," admits Randy. "But as a result there's a good chance fans will see more and better *Thief* games in the future. However, the impetus to support both view modes was to improve gameplay, and the game is much better as a result."

Navigating Garrett through a dim castle interior, we get our first look at the new perspective in action. Having played countless other stealth games in third-person, the transition is a natural one, though we soon find ourselves switching back and forth between view modes depending on the situation.

"Third-person provides better perspective on the overall environment and how Garrett fits into it," says Randy. "It lets you see the big picture and it affords some very compelling visuals of



Garrett sulked for days when he heard *Thief: The Movie* was to star Tobey Maguire.



"The AI is some of the best in the industry, especially in terms of alertness and sensory modelling"

RANDY SMITH PROJECT DIRECTOR

Garrett sticks his blackjack where the guard least expects it.

Garrett pulling off his cool moves: creeping along the walls, crouching in the shadows, climbing up to a second storey window, jumping out to ambush a guard and so on. First-person is generally better for the finer details, precision, a strong sense of immersion and, of course, seeing things from Garrett's perspective – which can be crucial when you want to make sure the guard really can't see you when you're hiding behind that column."

While the new perspective definitely opens up your options, some may find the disembodied view a bit of a 'cheat', as it allows you to view things outside of Garrett's direct line of sight. You can still play the game entirely in first-person of course, and as Randy insists, "There's nothing Garrett can do in third-person that he can't also do equally well in first."

UNDERCOVER BROTHER

But while the view may have changed, Garrett himself is much as we left him. All his old tricks are back – sneaking around, backstabbing enemies, firing rope arrows, picking locks, and so on. The lock-picking is handled a bit differently, but the only genuinely new ability is climbing stone walls. Hardly a revolution, you must say, but Ion Storm is still being tight-lipped about new tools, weapons and gadgets, and it's here that we're likely to see the most new game-actions emerging.

"There are some other cool new ways to interact with the environment," teases

Randy. "But yes, they pertain to the player tools we're still not talking about."

Clearly though, the coolest things about *Thief 3* aren't going to come from a new type of arrow or a new way of climbing walls. It's less immediately apparent things, like the subtlety of the AI and the environment physics that are going to have the most impact.

For a start, the Havok physics – it's not just ragdoll deaths and bottles falling off shelves we're talking here. Some real thought has gone into applying the realistic physics to the gameplay, and the results are nothing if not compelling. By way of example, Randy shows us a

First-person view is still essential in some situations.

few scenarios in which physics might create interesting gameplay. Some are familiar enough, having been seen in games like *Far Cry* and *Half-Life 2*. So, Garrett can drop a heavy item onto a guard's head, knocking him out. He can cause a distraction by rolling a barrel down a staircase. Or he might jump onto a table, scattering plates and dishes,

some of which might be valuable and wind up in hard-to-find locations. Better yet, Garrett can outdo Sam Fisher, creating his own shadows in lighted spaces by pushing furniture up against windows.

However, our favourite piece of physics in action comes straight from a *Looney Tunes* cartoon, when Randy

OUR FAVOURITE THIEVES



YOU CAN KEEP YOUR DICK TURPINS AND YOUR ROBIN HOODS, PC ZONE HAS OTHER IDEAS

Whether it's a deep-grained criminal streak, a yearning for anarchy or just because chicks love a bad boy, our culture is one that celebrates the thief. From Prometheus to Lara Croft, a taste for larceny has been rewarded with fame, celebrity and the admiration of young boys. Here then, in all their glory, are the *PC ZONE* team's thieves of choice.



PREZZER Raffles, the gentleman thief and cricket champ, who charmed the ladies then stole their necklaces.

WILL Pop-up Pirate. We don't know what he stole, but he'll always have a special place in Will's heart.

JAMIE Robert Maxwell, aka the Bouncing Czech, who stole from pensioners then jumped off a boat.

MARTIN Janosik, the so-called Slovak Robin Hood, folk hero of bear-baiters and potato farmers everywhere.

ANTHONY Happosai, lecherous underwear thief and master of perverted martial arts (from *Ranma 1/2* comics).

DAVE Celebrity shoplifter Winona Ryder, who turned out to be completely nuts, just the way Dave likes 'em.

THIEF: PERILOUS GLOOM

WHAT'S IN A NAME, YOU ASK? PLENTY, IF IT'S AS BAD AS THIS ONE

Like *Deus Ex: Invisible War* before it, *Thief 3* has lost its sensible numeration and gained a stupid subtitle. *Thief 3*, you see, might have confused any Xbox owners who play the game, because they might not have heard of the first two *Thiefs*. If they've been living under a rock with their ears full of silly putty, that is. So it's *Deadly Shadows*, because of course, you hide in the shadows, and you're a bit deadly. Not that you're a killer as such – in fact you're more of a medieval cat burglar really, but if provoked you certainly have the potential to be deadly. And yes, it's probably the stupidest, most insipid, committee-designed name for a stealth game since 'Metal Gear Solid: Sneaky Sneaky Bang Bang'. And we just made that one up.

Even on his way to the pub, Garrett hated to be seen.

Someone's about to spoil their uniform.

pushes a cart down a steep hill to bowl over some pursuing guards – truly comical stuff. "This is really just the tip of the iceberg," boasts Randy. "And these are not scripted events either; the player can cause them to happen dynamically during the normal course of gameplay."

CLEVER CLOGS

Hand in hand with this sort of high-level interaction of course, is a level of enemy intelligence that can react to it, and we soon move on to the game's AI. We've heard plenty of talk about how 'aware' of their surroundings the enemies are, but seeing them in action is a very different matter. Taking the controls, Randy fires up a typically gloomy level and starts sneaking around in the darkness.

"*Thief's* AI is some of the best in the industry," he enthuses, "especially in terms of sensory and alertness modelling. The guards see and hear evidence, which includes your footsteps as you walk around and glimpses of you out of the corner of their eye. Also, they'll notice torches that go out, guards missing from their posts, doors left ajar, missing valuables, broken furniture and blood pools, bodies, and other signs of recent combat. The more they see and hear, the more suspicious they become, and eventually they'll leave their patrol route to search. If a guard is not too suspicious, he'll search carelessly, but a very alerted guard will draw his sword and search carefully, poking into every corner of the room, opening doors, looking behind the furniture, and so on. And if they do find you, they'll attack you and call for help."

So saying, Randy passes through a cluttered armoury, emerging from shadow briefly to snatch a piece of brightly glinting loot. At almost the same instant, the room begins to glow faintly, as reflected light flickers into the room from the hallway. Being no fool, Randy

Q&A

RANDY SMITH



We fire a volley of burning queries at project director Randy Smith.

PCZ Can you give us details of any new weapons and gadgets?

RS We've put a lot of thought into broadening Garrett's toolkit and refining his trusty weapons and gadgets from the previous games. There are definitely some interesting new additions, but we're not talking about them much, yet...

PCZ How will Garrett's mechanical eye be used in the new game?

RS Garrett's mechanical eye allows him to zoom in on faraway features, which is great for scouting out a situation before sneaking your way in.

PCZ Can you tell us any more about the plot?

RS I can tell you that the plot progresses rapidly from a seemingly simple beginning into a complicated web of intrigue. This is to be expected given that Garrett spends time interacting with the Keepers, a meddlesome secret society that pulls the strings in The City and has numerous secrets to protect from prying eyes. The plot keeps moving at all times, and there are a lot of shocking developments that I think will surprise everyone.

PCZ Are there any notable differences between the PC and console versions?

RS Our goal is to support the same exact quantity and quality of gameplay on all platforms, but of course to achieve this we are specifically tuning each version of the game towards the particulars of that platform.

PCZ What would you say is your favourite part of the game, or the thing you're most proud of?

RS I'm proud of lots of things, some simple and some more elaborate. I really like 'informing', where a servant will run to get an armed guard if he catches you, because the two AIs engage in dynamic dialogue depending on whether they spot you or not. For example: "I just saw somebody!", "Lead the way, I'll follow you!", "He was right here, I swear I saw him!", "I believe you... I'd better take a look around, see if he's still around."

As a simpler example, I really like the 'loot glint'. Every valuable object in the game sparkles in a particular way. It's kind of like a thief's appraisal skill: from across the room you can look carefully and tell which goblets are golden and valuable and which are just worthless lumps of metal.

leaps behind some crates and crouches silently in the darkness, waiting for the unwanted presence to pass. Sure enough, a guard carrying a torch patrols by a few seconds later, but Randy is out of luck. In any other stealth game, this dullard would continue on his way,

Diehard Thief fans may balk at the new view.

oblivious to any change in the environment, but instead, he stops in his tracks, visibly frowning, and says, "Hey! Who took that?"

His suspicions aroused, the guard then begins a vigorous search, saying things like, "I'd better check over by those crates, someone could be hiding there." As Randy turns to make his getaway, he blunders into a rack of swords, which clatter to the ground noisily. "That's it," cries the guard, drawing his sword, "make a little more noise, it'll help me find ya!"

CLOAK AND DAGGER

Needless to say, this episode leaves us rather impressed. This guard has just displayed more intelligent behaviour than any opponent in any stealth game before – more intelligence than we've seen in just about any other game in fact. "The AI guards exhibit interesting and unpredictable behaviours pretty much any time we play the game," says Randy proudly. "No bullshit, this stuff really happens in our game all the time."

"The potential for an amazing game is clear and we've got plenty of time to polish and tune"

RANDY SMITH PROJECT DIRECTOR

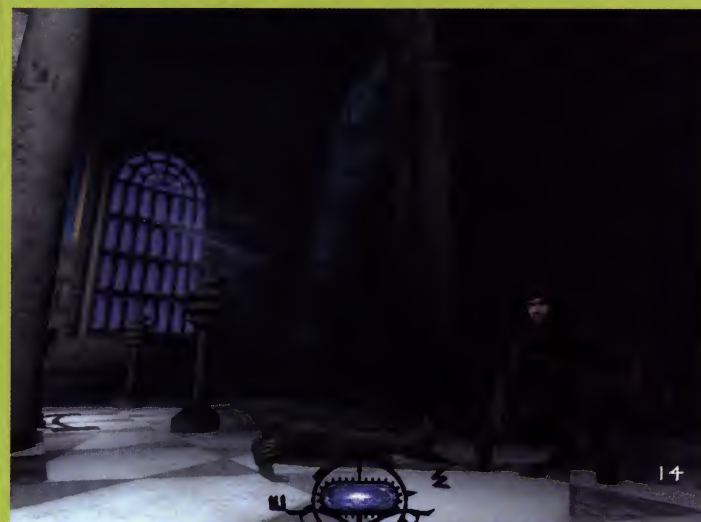
Lucky for Garrett, moody lighting was all the rage.

Clearly, the *Deadly Shadows* gameplay is going to equal or even surpass its *Deus Ex* stablemates for sheer freedom of action. And if anything, this style of freeform interaction is even more appropriate to the subject matter of *Deadly Shadows*. After all, thieves are by their very nature prone to challenging their environments and finding alternative ways of doing things.

It's easy to imagine that this was the ideal the series was building towards all along. Rather than just providing a string of sneaky, linear missions, it's this idea of simulating the life of a thief, giving a bit of insight into his motivations and above all the freedom to be a crafty, devious bastard. As great as the first two *Thief* games were, this could be the game we've really wanted all along. **PC**

At least in a place like this you know you're stealing from the rich.

Why Don't You?...



The third-person view lends the game a more cinematic feel, but surely more could be made of it than that.

DON'T BE HALF-HEARTED, PUT THIRD-PERSON TO GOOD USE

As you'll have read, *Thief: Deadly Shadows* now offers both first- and third-person perspectives, and the option of flicking between them at will. However, we reckon the third-person view could be used to add more substantial gameplay elements, rather than just being thrown in to appease the console crowd. Think of *Metal Gear* or *Splinter Cell* – they're third-person for a reason. Without the disembodied view, how could Solid Snake do the wall peek or crouch roll? How could Sam Fisher do his split-jump or forced interrogation? Though *Thief* has never been about this sort of acrobatics, there's no reason why it couldn't be beefed up for *Deadly Shadows*. Try this for a start: instead of firing a rope arrow, Garrett uses his rope to lay a noose-like trap on a shadowy patch of ground, before scampering up into the rafters to wait for a passing guard. As soon as a foot enters the trap – whoosh – he's off his feet and helpless as Garrett drops on him silently with a blade to the throat. Now *that* would make the new perspective worthwhile.

a roleplayer's
FANTASY.



"This is the Fantasy Action
Adventure Reinvented"
- NVIDIA

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PC CD





And now for something completely different...

FAHRENHEIT

"This is not a game." Has **Dave Woods** finally cracked or is he just running a temperature?

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER VU Games
PUBLISHER Quantic Dream
WEBSITE Q3 2004
ETA www.fahrenheitgame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's from the makers of *The Nomad Soul*
- It hasn't got David Bowie in it
- It's a completely original concept
- It's an adult game for adult people

"**THE ADVENTURE** game is dead. You might be surprised to hear me say that." Not entirely. Because I'd done my homework and discovered that David Cage, head of Quantic Dream and creator of *The Nomad Soul*, likes to do things differently. In his debut, the Bowie-fuelled Gallic adventure, he stuck fighting, shooting and adventuring into a big pot, stirred furiously and ended with a dish that tasted like nothing we'd ingested before. The words 'engrossing', 'flawed epic' and 'outrageous sexism' were bandied about in the review (although strangely the latter point was seen as a negative). The overriding opinion was that this was the future of the adventure game. Until now.

So what is *Fahrenheit*? It's probably easier to start off with what it's not. It's not a point-and-click adventure (they're dead), it's not an RPG (they're too time-consuming) and it's not an interactive movie. "We're not making *Dragon's Lair* here..." OK David, calm yourself, no-one suggested you were. "It's actually a psycho-thriller," he states.

Which doesn't help an awful lot because it's not really a genre that we're used to seeing outside of the cinema. So, David, in a single sentence, can you explain what *Fahrenheit* is? "Erm, no." Try harder. "It's an interactive experience where the actions of the player really affects the way the plot unfolds." Thank you.

QU'EST QUE C'EST?

It's modern-day New York. Seemingly random murders are being committed by everyday Joes, with no apparent rhyme or reason. Nutters, obviously. Except you play one of them, Lucas Kane, and it's your job to uncover the truth.

But that's not all. New York is inclemently cold and getting colder by the day. Why? Your job again, I'm afraid. And just to complicate things further, you also play the part of a policewoman, Carla



You play the murderer and the cop. Confused?

CV



QUANTIC DREAM

A French company that makes adventure games. Wait... Come back...

1999 *The Nomad Soul* is released, a curious, yet satisfying adventure that mixed *Tekken*-style combat, *Quake*-style shooting and 3D platforming with a lapdancing David Bowie. Did we say it was French?

2004 *Fahrenheit* is scheduled for release. Is it going to change the face of gaming forever? Only time will tell.



"No, it's Craig Davis - with an 'S'."



Not the face you want to see in the morning.



Hands of a murderer.



The lack of a visible interface ups the cinematic feel.

Valenti, charged with solving the rash of murders that have erupted on the face of New York City. Time to take a deep breath. So, you play the hunter and the hunted. How does that work then? Time to fire the game up...

BOG LIFE

You're sitting in a public toilet, contemplating life, when an old man walks across the room and washes his hands. Seemingly losing control over your body, you leave the confines of your cubicle, pull a knife out of your coat and plunge it into the man's heart three times, before carving cabalistic marks on your forearms. You then come round with more than a shudder of horror and try to work out what the hell's just happened. What do you do next?

Run outside, oblivious to the fact that you're carrying a knife, covered in blood and probably more than a bit wild-eyed? Or take a few seconds to collect your thoughts, wash yourself, hide the knife

and body and escape without drawing attention to yourself? Come on, you're playing against the clock here.

From this point on the game is played in real-time. If you're recoiling at the thought of revisiting the travesties of the '90s, so-called 'interactive movies' like *Phantasmagoria* and *Harvester*, then relax. As David explains: "In *Fahrenheit*, there's no pre-rendered stuff - everything is done in real-time and we've tried to make it all interactive. Even when you're making really simple actions like pushing a door, you're actually pushing a door yourself." That probably needs a bit more explanation and although it's almost impossible to describe without playing the game, these are the basics of the game mechanics.

Played out in full 3D, there's no visible interface as such. Instead, all your actions are supposed to be intuitive: so, if you move towards a door and stretch an arm out, you'll push the door open or closed. Every action you make is supposed to feel

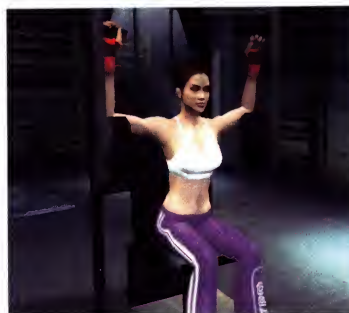
"You pull a knife out of your coat and plunge it into the man's heart three times"

as natural as possible. Initially conceived on a PC, the control system has been changed to accommodate two analogue sticks, and David admits that he's still not sure how to maximise the experience using conventional PC controls.

HIDE AND SEEK

But enough of the technicalities for now. When you've done your doings and scurpered, the action switches to Carla Valenti, who arrives at the scene of the crime looking for clues. And I know what you're going to say next. 'If you've just hidden the knife, then surely you'll know exactly where to look for it?' But no, because if you're astute enough in the game to hide the blade, the action cuts leaving you in the dark. You know that you have to search the scene of the crime, but you don't know where to look.

Your actions directly affect the way the game pans out, and although the ramifications for gameplay aren't entirely clear, David is convinced that Quantic has



Who said the gym was boring?



Anyone seen Big Bird?

FLIPPING THE BIRD

FRENCH MEN HANGING FROM WIRES? SOUNDS LIKE OUR SORT OF GIG...

Quantic Dream houses its very own 24-camera motion capture studio, which was used to film every animation in the game. It took three months to record all the footage and Quantic ended up with over 20 hours for the game – a massive amount considering most games make do with about 30 minutes. Over 15 actors were used in total, including cast members from a number of Jet Li films and the footage breathes a peculiar realism into the game.

This is compounded with Quantic's innovative facial animation system, which David Cage claims is up there with the most advanced techniques in the world. "You've probably seen footage from *Half-Life 2* – I'm not saying ours is better or worse, but we can produce animations much quicker." On the fly, in fact, through a system worked by a puppeteer – each movement of the puppeteer's glove corresponds to a movement in the character's face. We won't reveal the in-game look we got when we managed to provoke the puppeteer into flipping the bird.



It's motion and it's captured.



"Jerry, what have you done with the Phoenix Club?"

created the first fully interactive narrative. He calls it the 'rubber band' theory, which relates to the fact that the story you end up with could be long (stretched) or short, depending on the route you decide to take. If nothing else, it's a bold vision: "I wanted to prove that a game can be as engrossing as a movie."

But is that really possible? A good film is a completely passive experience where you're guided through the action with carefully choreographed ingredients that would be useless in the hands of an inexperienced punter. How can you hope to combine narrative and interaction to the point that neither is an afterthought and both compliment each other. David?

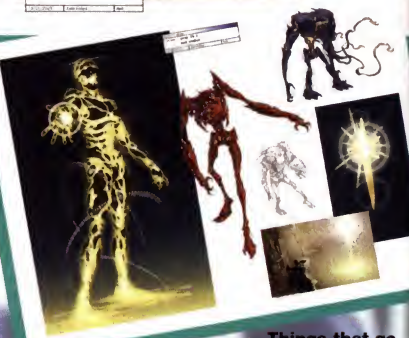
"This is the real challenge. I've heard a lot of people say that interactive storytelling is something that can't exist because storytelling is linear. I strongly believe they're wrong. I think you can have a very good quality story, but you can make it interactive too – and this is the basis of *Fahrenheit*. The core experience is the interactive element, and from there we've asked ourselves what kind of story can we tell? We haven't done

the reverse, which is coming up with a great story and then trying to add interactive elements because you're going to end up with a crap story you're not interested in and interactive elements that don't work."

NOSTRODAMUS

But if you only control two main characters, how can the entire story be interactive? "Good question. You see, there are moments where you need to watch a sequence of events and try to intervene at the right time."

You're back at your apartment, bloodied clothes on your bed, when you're yanked out of your body and outside your apartment where, in a premonition, you see a policeman about



Things that go bump in the night.

to knock on your front door. You can stretch this vision by correctly following the policeman's actions and if you do, you get to see clues that will help you cover your tracks before he arrives at your door. If you fail, you're stuck back in your body with no hints and a set amount of time to make your flat more acceptable to the local gendarme.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Apparently, there are up to ten different plot outcomes to this sequence, but we're not going to reveal any for fear of spoiling the game. Some of these might be fatal or

Why Don't You?...

THE GAME'S GREAT, BUT I WANT MORE...

Fahrenheit is cinematic in scope, so why not go the whole hog and release it on DVD only, with the sort of extras that you get when you buy a film? We put it to David Cage and it's not completely out of the question. "I'd like to have a big 'making of' feature – we've got a lot of stuff that we'd like to share. We like to open our doors and show people what we're doing. My real dream would be to have a version of the game that's linear, with a director's commentary over the top."

Ultimately, it'll be a decision made by Vivendi, a company that's already shown it's got balls by snapping up a project that's got 'different' plastered all over it. So why not go the whole hog and show other publishers how games should be packaged in the future?

"There are up to ten plot sequences to this game alone – some may be fatal, some will move the story along"

FAKE ID

DROP THE KIDS OFF AT THE POOL, THIS GAME IS FOR ADULTS ONLY...

As you've probably gathered by now, the tone of *Fahrenheit* is distinctly adult, although David Cage is quick to point out that this is 'adult' in a contextual rather than a gratuitous way (although being French, you can expect to see the odd nipple or two). "We've tried to give a lot of background to our characters, give them real concerns and real situations so you can believe in them as people living real lives. I think that leads to proper adult content, not just adding sex and violence."

The sort of films that have inspired the game – "*Se7en*, *Fight Club*, *Angel Heart* and pretty much anything by David Lynch" – should give you a good idea of what's ahead, but expect the unexpected too. "Inspirations? You never really know where things come from. And sometimes you really don't want to know." Er, quite. Can we leave now please?



Se7en: cheery and inspirational.



Eraserhead: a Lynch masterpiece.



Earn extra points for personal hygiene.



Go on... Spit in his burger.



24-style split-screen action helps pull the narrative together.

lead to the end of the story, in which case you get the option to replay that entire chapter (as you would on a DVD). Others merely move the story on, in whatever direction you've chosen.

According to David, though, this doesn't mean the game has to be either ten times bigger or ten times shorter than your average game, although he's definitely not interested in length for length's sake.

"I want to make a game that's ten hours maximum. It's hard to tell a story and to remember everything in a 40-hour story. There's still this idea that if you pay for a game, you expect 40 or 80 hours



Lucas is your archetypal anti-hero.



A big empty church. Yesterday.



Just add candles and bubble bath...

because the more you get, the better the value. We don't subscribe to that idea. Does anyone think that a longer movie is necessarily a better movie? What would you prefer, the best seven or eight hours you've ever had or 80 hours of falling asleep?" Well, now you put it like that...


And don't think for a second that the entire game is going to be pedestrian, a case of making choices and following them through. Action sequences are key to the concept of *Fahrenheit*, and I was treated to brief snatches of a couple *Matrix*-style scenarios: one where you're running down a busy road, dodging the cars and trucks hurtling towards you; and the other a martial arts sequence performed by professionals used in a number of Jet Li films.

HERE'S HOPING...

This mix of real-life scenarios and more arcade-like action sequences make *Fahrenheit* a peculiar beast. And, although I've got absolutely no idea whether it's

going to work, I'm going to keep my fingers and toes crossed until its release.

To be honest (and don't bother writing in because I love *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*), I don't ever want to play a game where I have to combine a blancmange with a winch to open an invisible trapdoor again. Watching a short snatch of cartoon before wading through an impossibly big inventory, combining everything in the hope of progressing the story is just so passé, darling. Neither do I want to spend 43 hours killing rats, collecting mushrooms and wading through sheaves of dialogue before levelling up and taking on slightly larger rats with a larger sword and shiny armour. Life's too short.

I want a dark, contemporary narrative that I control, with decent and believable voice acting, edge-of-the-seat action, sequences I'm in the centre of and an adult feel that makes me feel slightly soiled yet curiously involved and elated. I just don't know if it's possible... 



Funny-looking rats.



Damn you pesky stray cows.



If things are looking a bit ropery, you can call in air strikes.



Gaining a height advantage or digging in will give your tanks the edge in battle.



"Sandbags! Two paaand a paaand! Get 'em while they're hot..."

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Reality
PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
WEBSITE www.desertratsgame.com
ETA March 26

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Could well be the first decent 3D WWII RTS
- Play as Axis or Allies
- 140 different vehicle types
- Hugely tactical
- No resource management

Korps blimey it's...

DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS

Martin Korda gets tanked as the 3D RTS heads for the desert

CV

DIGITAL REALITY

DIGITAL REALITY

Founded in 1995, this small Hungarian-based company has three games of varying quality under its belt.

- 2002** *Haegemonia: Legions Of Iron*. This 3D space-based RTS is released to widespread critical acclaim, but sadly fails to shift as many copies as it deserves to.
- 2002** *Platoon*. A poor Vietnam squad-based shooter that makes us wonder whether Digital Reality is just a one-hit wonder.
- 2003** *Haegemonia: The Solon Heritage*. Expansion pack for *Haegemonia* proves to be a return to form, though it doesn't quite hit the heights of the original game.

OF ALL the WWII conflicts, the campaign in Africa is probably the most overlooked. In fact, not that many people know much about it, so if you're one of the many who spent more time blowing soggy paper balls through hollowed-out biros at your classmates than you did listening to your Fisherman's Friend-smelling history teacher, here's a quick bit of background info before we get started on the game.

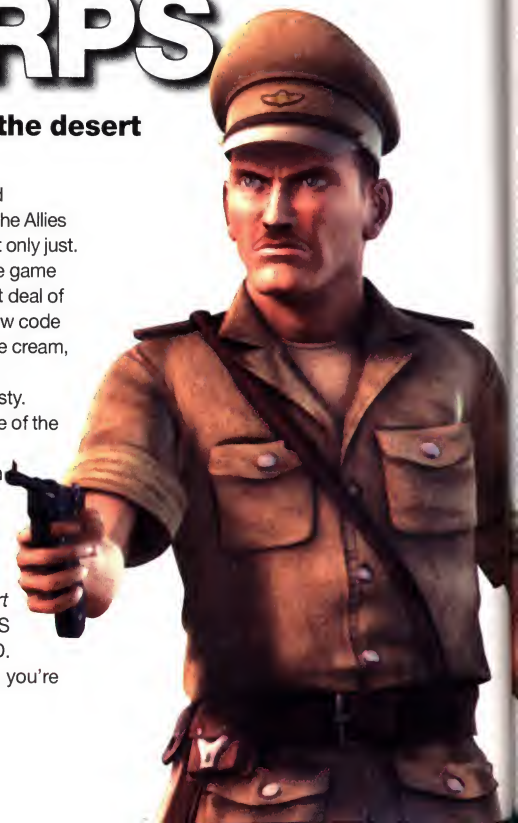
WARNING: HISTORICAL FACTS PART

After the French capitulation in 1940, the Italians and Germans turned their attentions to North Africa. The battle swung backwards and forwards for the best part of three years, mainly between General Erwin 'Desert Fox' Rommel's

Africa Korps and General Bernard Montgomery's Desert Rats, with the Allies eventually coming out on top. But only just.

Clearer now? Good. On to the game then, which, having spent a great deal of quality time with the latest preview code (we went to the beach, had an ice cream, raced on the go-carts...) we can confidently say is looking a bit tasty. Indeed, this 3D RTS could be one of the surprise packages of the year.

Divided into two, ten-mission story-driven campaigns – Axis and Allies – you play as either a stiff-upper-lipped English or Chippy-bombing German hero. It's striking just how much *Desert Rats* reminds us of isometric RTS classic *Sudden Strike*, only in 3D. Bereft of resource management, you're





Later missions will see you in command of sizeable forces of tanks, trucks, mortars and foot soldiers.

left to concentrate on the more tactical and subtle aspects of warfare, picking your units before the start of each level and later being backed up by an array of reinforcements.

DESERT COMBAT

With troops in such limited supply, it'll be essential to utilise your surroundings to gain maximum advantage. If you're to stand any chance of success, you'll have to master such skills as digging into the sand for extra cover, assuming an elevated position to help outgun and out-maneuvre the enemy, and flanking them (where their armour is weakest) with the ferocity of a boarding school headmaster trapped in a dark room with a small yelping boy.

Desert Rats' engine is also pretty damn impressive, with a fully interactive and deformable landscape that enables

your tanks to mow down trees, kick up plumes of sand with their caterpillar tracks and level buildings to dust with their awesome firepower.

But it's not all just about tanks, with good old salt-of-the-earth soldiers playing an integral role in the proceedings, too. Flame-thrower units can incinerate entire squads of enemies with one twitch of their clammy finger, or turn trucks into moving

as if that wasn't enough, you'll even be able to call in air strikes to aid you if it's all looking a bit ropery on the ground.

IT'S HELL OUT THERE

Some of the missions in the current build are truly spectacular. One sees you landing on a beach, enemy mortar fire cascading down around your vulnerable foot soldiers, sending spirals of sand

"Cascading enemy mortar fire sends spirals of sand arching into the air, along with broken, bloodied bodies"

bonfires. Medics heal, bazooka troops can stop the mightiest of motorised beasts and best of all, your hero – who you must preserve at all costs – gives nearby troops a huge combat bonus. And

arching into the air along with broken, bloodied bodies, while gut-twisting explosions ring out around you.

Another sees you racing across the desert, your massed columns of tanks



Come back here you Panzer!



A big light for a big cigar.

kicking dust clouds into the sky, a beacon of hope to the besieged force you're racing to rescue. On arrival, you tear into the enemy backline, using sand dunes to gain elevation and the upper hand over the superior-sized German ranks.

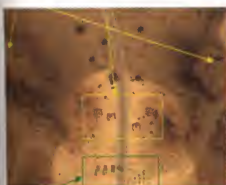
In familiar RTS style, there's also an escort mission through enemy-infested territory, which sees you protecting a precious cargo as enemy shells from tanks and mortars try to break your ranks. Still another sees you embroiled in street-by-street combat in a desert town, your machines of war being sent sky-high by rockets from cunningly concealed enemy forces.

There may not be many games based on the African campaign in WWII, but from the looks and feel of what we've played, *Desert Rats* could kick up quite a storm on its arrival. That said, it would benefit from some better voice-acting (which we've been promised will be in place in time for release) and a freer camera. And while the scripted in-mission sequences work well enough, it'll also be interesting how much replayability the game will offer as a result.

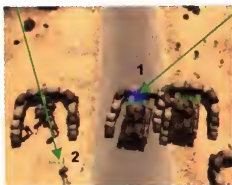
Still, we have high hopes for this one, and when the review code scuttles in next issue, we could well rat(e) it highly. See what I did there? Oh dear, that was misjudged... [X]

WALKTHROUGH →

Let's go through a typical level, step-by-step, and see what we find. Follow me...



1 Each mission starts with a cut-scene. Here, Italian forces are under attack, with two of their artillery units (left and right yellow arrows) having been knocked out by air strikes. Your units (boxed in green) arrive to back up the Italians.



2 Hold off the enemy till reinforcements arrive. You need to move your tanks behind the sandbags, digging them in for extra protection first – then bring your scout forward to enhance your view of the advancing enemy.



3 To strengthen your position, load some troops into two trucks and send them up the hills either side of where you are. They can man the two remaining artillery guns, as attacking from elevated terrain gives you an advantage.



4 Once you've repelled the enemy attacks, your reinforcements will arrive (boxed in green). Having set up your defences so well, many of your existing units should still be intact too. Time to counter-attack.



5 Every so often, a movie will announce a big event. Here we see the enemy mounting a flanking attack. Your counter-attack will have to wait till you deal with this, although with your superior numbers, it's not too tough.



6 Time to complete your primary objective – to overrun an enemy base. Attacking straight on is the quickest route, but with the base's defences weaker on the sides, this path will prove a more effective way of winning the level.



"Can you just clip that bit of thread hanging from my hat? Ta."



You've gotta love the 'Nam...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pivotal Games
PUBLISHER SCI
WEBSITE www.pivotalgames.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Four-man tactical team shooter – and hey, it's not World War II!
- Farewell *Desert Storm II*'s repetitive action; hello tense story and characterisation
- *Medal of Honor*-style shooty bits in helicopters and boats
- Lost in the jungle, you must salvage all weapons and use booby traps

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

Having grown up believing Agent Orange was a character from Cluedo, Will Sargent wasn't best prepared for the harsh reality of jungle warfare

IT'S 1968. You're a 19-year-old all-American boy with little more to worry about than polishing your brand-new Firebird convertible, combing that Brylcreemed quiff to perfection and waiting for the next Stones release to hit the stores.

Little do you know, of course, that in the blink of an eye you'll be thousands of miles from home, head shaven, coughing up blood on to the jungle floor, surrounded by smoke and the dismembered bodies of US soldiers.

Having stormed the charts with two incredibly timely *Conflict: Desert Storm* titles (the sequel arriving just in time for the Bush family's second stab at Saddam), Pivotal's

third tactical shooter teleports us back to the late '60s, to the military and political swamp that was the Vietnam War.

Yes, in a time when George Bush and his fellow draft dodgers were tucked up safely in the Texas Air National Guard canteen, listening (ironically) to Louis Armstrong's *It's A Wonderful World*, it's down to you and another three million wet-behind-the-ears US troops to dodge the poisoned bamboo spikes of the hardened North Vietnamese army, playing Kennedy's cop to the communist robber.

If you played either of the previous *Conflict* games, you'll know the series eschews plot in favour of action. Or at least that's been the

story so far. In this third episode there's a refreshing change, with the focus falling far more on story and characterisation.

GOOD MORNING VIETNAM!

"*Conflict: Vietnam* is essentially the story of Private Harold Kahler, a 19-year-old recruit who doesn't know what he's let himself in for," reveals lead designer Marc Curtis. "In the previous games we concentrated on the Special Forces aspect of warfare, but here we want to get across the soldier's point of view, after he's been drafted into this terrible war.

"The other three characters in your squad are veterans. They've done a couple of tours of Vietnam so they're

"In Vietnam, we want to get across the soldier's point of view after he's been drafted into this terrible war"

MARC CURTIS
 LEAD DESIGNER, PIVOTAL GAMES

CV

PIVOTAL
GAMES

PIVOTAL GAMES

Pivotal Games is a relatively new name under which many well-worn industry legends hide. The company was formed in 2000 after the demise of Pumpkin Studios, responsible for the excellent RTS *Warzone 2100*. Based in the Bristol area, the company's 70-odd personnel have, in their collective pasts, worked on some staggeringly important games, including *Dungeon Master* (Atari ST), *Eye Of The Beholder*, *X-COM* and *Dungeon Keeper 2*.

2002 *Conflict: Desert Storm*. Pivotal's debut was a number-one smash and established the semi-tactical squad-based formula for the series.

2003 *The Great Escape*. A mediocre stealth effort that was a huge hit with your dad.

2003 *Conflict: Desert Storm II – Back To Baghdad*. The inevitable sequel followed closely in the original's footsteps, with some slight tweaks.







Just ignore him on the floor. He always does that for attention.

quite hardened – hence they mistrust the new recruit, seeing him as a liability. Our story centres around how this young soldier, who's initially nicknamed 'Cherry', wins them over, and eventually earns a more respectable nickname."

Although the Vietnam war ran from 1965-1973 (during which time a staggering eight million tons of US bombs devastated the bountiful Vietnamese terrain), the new game focuses on a single, critical month of the campaign. Here, it's 1968, running up to the Tet Offensive when most of South Vietnam was invaded by northern troops (NLF – National Liberation Front). It was at this point that the war

changed from a simple guerrilla war into, well, a burning, bloody mess.

"Your four guys are shot down early on in the game behind enemy lines, but because there's a massive offensive going on there are no rescue birds coming in. The team has to find its own way back through hardened Vietcong troops. If you're successful, you'll make it out of the jungle and back to the city of Hue – the old imperial capital of Vietnam, where the final two levels of the game unfold."

THERE'S NO 'I' IN WAR

Having experimented with eight and even 16-player teams ("it played like a bloody RTS" interjects Pivotal's charismatic MD, Jim Bamba), *Conflict: Vietnam* sticks with the four-man formula tried and tested in *CDS I & II*.

It's your responsibility to escort Staff Sergeant Frank Wier, Corporals Bruce Lesh and Will Shafer, and the aforementioned Private Harold Kahler through the game unharmed.

If one of them buys the farm it's game over. Finito.

Don't panic though, because

SHOW US YER BOOBIES...



Watch those sharp leaves. Many a soldier was lost to leaf cuts.

HORRIFIC BOOBY TRAPS PROMISE MUCH SPIKE-FOOTED HILARITY

As Dwight Yorke, Gareth Gates and Peter André will tell you, there's nothing more lethal than a booby trap. But seriously, did you know that booby traps were responsible for killing more US troops in the Vietnam War than any other weapon? Ironically, most of the exploding traps, such as the Bouncing Betty (which catapulted a bomb six feet into the air) were built from unexploded US munitions. Step on one of those in the game and you're bugged – as you are if you get a sharpened, bamboo 'Punji' stick in the 'nads.

Of course, a spike to the nether regions will smart somewhat, but because the pointy bits have been smeared in human faeces, it's more likely you'll die a slow death through infection. That is, if the flies don't chew your plums off first. So, it's essential that you first, don't step on them; and second, learn how to dismantle them and use them on the enemy. Remember, you're lost in enemy territory with nowt but a toothbrush and a rusty pistol to start with, so it's time to put everything to good use.

you're given three minutes to heal any downed team member, and your new-fangled compass will find them, however far they've meandered into the lush vegetation. Sticking with these four characters should at least build empathy over the 20 hours or so of gameplay.

"You can charge through the early levels of the game playing as one character and simply have the others follow, but you'll never get through the later levels unless you work as a team," reveals Bamba.

"After most missions of previous *Conflict* games, you went back to base and re-equipped yourselves. But there's more tension now. You're lost and on your own. You have to salvage weapons and equipment as you make your way past enemy lines to safety. You'll find all sorts

of stuff, from rare six-barrel machine guns to crossbows and booby traps."

LESSONS LEARNED?

We can't fault the design brief, and our arses are already twitching at the thought of being lost behind enemy lines with Charlie rustling about nearby. But we're also thinking back to *CDS II*'s overly-complicated controls. Telling your team-mates where to stand, what stance to adopt, whether to open fire and where to move afterwards required more hot-keys than a Russian flight sim. Please reassure us that some development time has been shared between this cracking new yarn and a simplified key-combo system that doesn't tie your fingers in knots?

"I'll admit it," says Bamba. "Even though the second *CDS* was seen as one

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

LEVELLING-UP? IN A TACTICAL SHOOTER? WHATEVER NEXT...

A simple, yet critical aspect of *Conflict: Vietnam* is its character experience system. A cinch to understand, you ignore it at your peril. After each level you're invited to distribute experience points among the boys to help progress stats such as 'sniping', 'explosives' and 'medical'. The game's chief designer advises sticking with your four-man team's initial areas of expertise, although you can change these if you really want to. For example, lantern-jawed Corporal Will 'Hoss' Shafer starts out as a heavy machine-gunner, so it's probably best to expand his bulging biceps from the off. If you want the scrawny new boy to transfer from being a knife, fork and spoon expert in favour of machine-gunning, it'll cost you a lot more experience.

Your four men have approximately ten categories to work on, each of which can be levelled up from zero to ten. It's worth remembering that you'll miss out on experience points (and so rewards and medals) if you play the game on 'easy'.



If there's one thing I can do, it's tie a cravat.



No time for twitchy trigger fingers – this well-guarded village is probably NVA-controlled.

of the more accessible tactical shooters, the controls needed some improving. It was no good being shot to bits while fumbling through a massive inventory of items to find a medipack – and this is precisely why we've introduced a new context-sensitive command system."

We're shown a few examples. Now, when one of your men lies on the floor, arms flailing and chin hanging by a thread, you're immediately invited to 'heal'. When facing a door it's 'open', and when looking down at a booby trap, 'defuse'.

THE BIG GUN, PLEASE

"There were too many weapons to carry in the last game, so we've trimmed the inventory. You've got a pistol, a rifle and a heavy weapon slot now, and you can only hold one of each at a time. We still have a selection of other inventory items such as grenades, booby traps and medikits (one type heals all), and there'll be plenty of items to pick up along the way."

So saying, our demonstrator Karl Stubbs flicks through the inventory in



Stairway to heaven? Highly unlikely.

organic stuff to it. Also, because it's done in-house, we can do anything we want. We're not reliant on a third party telling us how it looks and what we can do."

The game certainly looks a lot more advanced than *CDS II*, with a tidy variety of jungle, river and town locations. However, texturing and character animation is still some way behind *Call Of Duty* or *Hidden & Dangerous 2*. At least it was reassuring to see all hands and feet stay firmly in place without drifting in and out of scenery.

The soldier models are brand new, with full ragdoll effects in place, and *Boxing Helena* fans will be pleased to hear most body parts can be removed if



Muzzle flash is one of many new impressive 3D effects.

only ever notice the cock-ups. You never stop to think 'oh, that's working well' when everything's running fine."

Some new maths sees your men duck under windows as they pass occupied buildings, while they also hide behind cover before letting rip with a few rounds to check whether they can sprint forward to the next safe point. Unfortunately, enemy manoeuvres are equally astute, but at least their intelligence levels creep up in line with your own.

With most of the 14 or so levels in place, it's a good start for *Conflict: Vietnam*. We've yet to see the promised 'on rails' helicopter and boat shooty-sections, which could potentially make or break the game. However, once the fully orchestrated soundtrack and authentic tunes from the era are in place, we reckon Pivotal could well be on to a winner. **PCZ**

Why Don't You?...



"You go first", "no, you go first", "no..." etc etc.

GET THE TEAMWORK RIGHT OR GET RID OF IT...

Pivotal is really pulling out all the stops with *Vietnam*, improving nearly every aspect of *Desert Storm II*'s design. But one thing that bugs us generally about tactical shooters (and, dare we say, *Desert Storm I* and *II*) is that they're usually, well, too darn fiddly. The temptation is to shuffle forward through each level, controlling the one guy, while your other stupid twats die in a hail of bullets around you. Surely the idea is to provide us with entertainment and rewards, not frustration?

This is why we will insist on faultless team AI and an intuitive control system that never lets us down. In fact (and Pivotal MD Jim Bamba hinted at this), why not have, effectively, a *Halo*-style single-player mode where the other three men are alongside helping, but are ultimately responsible for their own actions? Pivotal's AI men can groan in unison now...

"This is the old *Desert Storm* engine but with loads more features built in"

third-person – any unused weapons are slung over the soldier's back. It's a nice touch, negating the need to press the inventory key when full concentration is needed in combat.

SOLID FOUNDATIONS

So, it appears the team has addressed critical gameplay issues, but what about the look of the game? After spending so long wiping sand from their helmets, Pivotal's artists must have been running wild with all that jungle foliage to hide in.

"This is the old *Desert Storm* engine, but with loads more features built in," says Bamba. "The original engine was written from scratch and we spent four years on it. Not only did we have to get *Desert Storm* out in two years, we also had to complete the engine. This time round it was great because we've got this solid engine and we can add lots of

enough force is applied. There are also stacks of new environmental physics in this game. Dense jungle foliage sways hypnotically from side to side, while the thumping rotor blades of a chopper will make vegetation blow all over the place.

Weather effects add another layer of realism too. Our demo man peppers the roof of a bamboo shelter with bullets and watches as water trickles through into puddles on the floor. Nice. There are also dynamic water effects when bombs go off in the winding river sections (yes, we're promised a scenic cruise or two). This is definitely a step up from *CDS II*, but if you're still clinging on to your GeForce 3, you needn't sell the wife just yet.

To avoid the sometimes kamikaze behaviour of the last game, no small amount of work has gone into polishing the AI too, with a dedicated two-man team tasked with improving the brains of



The lava-like bits – that's terraforming.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER K-D Labs

PUBLISHER Codemasters

WEBSITE www.codemasters.co.uk/perimeter

ETA April 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Terraforming land-grab strategies
- Morph your units to suit every eventuality
- Bizarre alien worlds rendered with a splendid 3D engine
- Inscrutable plot that is either genius or madness

OVER THE years, we've seen real-time strategy games cover every conceivable setting. We've seen games set at the dawn of civilisation in Egypt and then Rome. We've witnessed them cover the Dark and Middle Ages of Europe, and the feudal period of Japan. We've watched as massive armies manoeuvre across maps of France, Germany and Russia in Napoleonic times and both the World Wars. Realms of legend and fantasy have been contested, as have distant planets – worlds of ice, sand,



From Russia with love – *Perimeter* is a highly unusual and original RTS.

Alien-proof fence...

PERIMETER

Land is the chief resource in this far-future RTS, but you'll have to knock it into shape first. Surely the very definition of ground-breaking, asks Steve O'Hagan?

water and fire. But it's taken until now for us to be presented with the opportunity to test our tactical acumen in an RTS that sees vicious conflict rage across a landscape composed of sponge.

OK, so we're not talking 'Battle Bugs 2: Conquest Of The Fairy Cake', but we are talking alien worlds composed of a soft, malleable surface matter that resembles – according to the in-game tutorial at least – sponge. And if this environmental background sounds a wee bit strange to you, wait until you see the

rest of game. Almost everything about *Perimeter* is as alien – even to a fairly well-versed RTS gamer – as the porous landscape.

“Burrowing craft boil the earth beneath their enemy's feet”

But don't get us wrong – in this day and age of copycat cash-ins and cloned sequels, we're all for a game that dares to do things a little differently. And this

beguiling combination of setting and gameplay mechanics could well make it worth checking out above the battalion of other RTSs that will be released this year.

The game takes place in a far-flung galaxy that mankind has fled to escape a dying Earth. There, humanity's disparate factions must compete with each other,



The only good land is flat land. That bit's rubbish.



The Millennium Dome was still unpopular.



You have many varieties of robot units to play with.



The perimeter defence shield = crazy.

as well as hostile indigenous forces, to secure an inhabitable world.

IN THE FRAME

At the beginning of a typical mission, you start on a wild, undulating landscape with only your 'Frame', or mothership. From this pyramid-like structure emerge your basic worker units – the brigadiers. These minute, swarming robots may resemble fleas, but they are capable of some pretty extraordinary feats of terraforming. Mark out a swathe of hilly territory and they scuttle off en masse and sculpt it all to 'zero' level – effectively flattening it all out.

The importance of this is that at zero level, the very land itself begins to produce energy that you can tap into by building power cores. Needless to say,

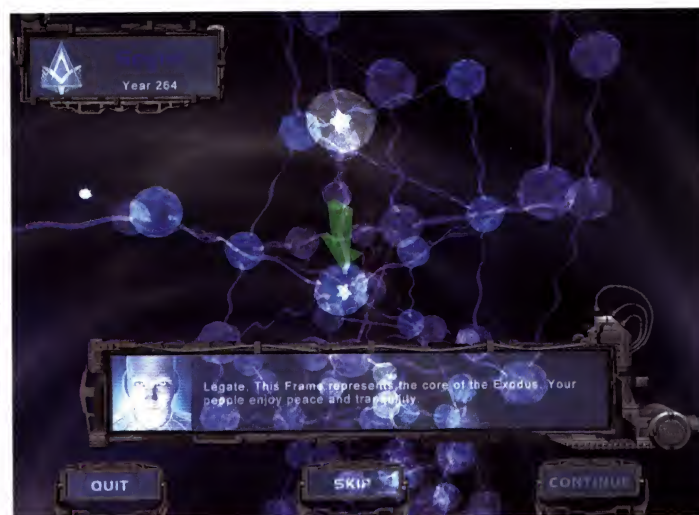
MAD WORLD

IS THE PERPLEXING SETTING OF *PERIMETER* SHEER MADNESS, OR JUST THE KIND OF THING THAT'S POPULAR IN RUSSIA?

It's really quite hard to get an exact handle on the plot of *Perimeter*. Whether it's down to translation problems, drug abuse or simply the fact that the guys behind it are clinically insane, the story is as confusing and downright weird as sci-fi comes.

What we do know is this: mankind has fled a dying Earth for a galaxy located in an alternate dimension – the Psychosphere. Which is where it starts going a little nuts. As far as we can tell, this galaxy is a series of floating worlds, each one reflecting the inner fears, thoughts and dreams of those who visit them. Which accounts for the great silvery snakes that glide through the air spewing fire and flocks of carrion-like kamikaze birds that explode when they ram your units, among other things.

Which makes us think, is this a Russian/East European preoccupation? Because *Solaris*, the George Clooney film (in which a planet reflects the moods and memories of people near it) was originally a Russian film based on a Polish book. All we need now is Gorgeous George to make an appearance in the final thing.



The worlds of the Psychosphere connect in a baffling DNA-type structure.

this energy – the game's sole resource – can then be transferred into the construction of the buildings and units that you'll need to go lay waste to your enemies with.

What this effectively means is that land – in its terraformed state – is the stuff of victory. The player who manages to carve out the most of this zero level plain is the one who will inevitably win. Not only will he have the energy production to fuel his war machine, but he will have the ground on which to build it, as structures can only be erected on

terrain that has been prepared by your teeming brigadiers.

NANO STATE

All of this is brought to your eyes via a robust 3D engine. The viewpoint can be tilted from a top-down perspective to a ground level view, and is fully rotatable. The alien landscapes are at times quite beautiful, in an obscure, psycho-organic kind of way. When things are up and running is where it comes into its own, though, with humming generators creating criss-crossing lines of energy



The FA was happy with the new Wembley Stadium design.



The alien landscapes are not those of your average RTS, that's for sure.

CV



K-D LABS

These guys are obviously a talented bunch, with all their games demonstrating graphical excellence and, shall we say, a desire to be different. But they're still searching for their first international hit, so they must have high hopes for *Perimeter*.

1997 *Biplex*. While still cutting their teeth in game design, the K-D boys produced this shareware arcade puzzler. The game is a combination of *Tetris* and *Arkanoid* (that old arcade classic that combined *Break Out* with *Space Invaders*), and is still around for download on the Net.

1998 *Vangers: One For the Road*. Described by the developer as a 'surrealistic action-adventure', *Vangers* was in fact a slightly tedious and confusing top-down driving/shooting game set in a world eerily similar to that of *Perimeter* – all bio-organic design with fully deformable terrain and such. Apparently very popular in its native Russia, it wasn't here – and rightly so.

2002 *Spanking Runners*. This never got released over here, and if the title is anything to go by, that's a good thing. Another driving game, this time K-D Labs dropped the bizarre psychedelia of *Vangers* for a cartoony, cutesy approach, but the common theme of the utterly bizarre continued with a turn-based mode. *Mario Kart* meets *Chess*? Again, it's apparently very big in Russia. Must be something to do with the cold weather.

throughout your base, terraforming bots scuttling around, and legions of robotic soldiers standing at the ready.

The perimeter of the game's name refers to the defence shields your bases can create. Using linked generators, you can throw up an awesome-looking, high-on impenetrable shield around your buildings. Like a wobbly, translucent envelopment of unassailable jelly, these screens really are something to behold.

Within the shelter of your protective ectoplasm, structures must be connected to your power grid by energy cores, and smashing someone's energy chain is one tactic for powering down his war machine. If you can manage this, as well as creating a bridge of terraformed land



Mark your land with your big green pen, then watch your little robots flatten it.

from your base to your opponents', you can capture enemy structures by connecting them to your own network via generators.

AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN

In what will be anathema to many RTS gamers, the number of units under your control in a mission will not rise much above a handful. In the missions we played, three or four was typical. But these 'command' units are made up of many little nano-technology robotic troops of three varieties: soldiers, officers and technicians. These are known as the 'basic units', and once produced they automatically join up with one of your command units where they stand around together, move together and fight together. Which, when you consider each command unit can comprise hundreds of basic units, saves on an awful lot of clicking.

But the main reason behind having these three types of basic unit reveals itself in the unit morphing system. By combining the right numbers of basic units and building certain research laboratories, you can start morphing your units into specialist squads. This morphing can be done or undone as many times as you like, and only takes a few seconds to achieve, allowing you to change the specialisation of your troops to fit whatever tactical situation that might arise.

GRAND CANYON

So from your basic gunners, you might morph into a squad of laser snipers to take out some enemy troops at long range. Then you might need to cross a canyon to get at the enemy base, so you change your snipers into anti-grav dropships. Once across, a quick switch into mortar units allows you to start



A fire-breathing silvery dragon thing savages your base. Where's Gandalf?



All your structures need to be a) on flat land, and b) linked by power cores.



You can create incredibly complex installations.

bombarding your opponent's structures. And these mutations only scratch the surface. There's a whole host of nano-technologically modified war machines out there, including craft that burrow through the ground, boiling the earth beneath their enemy's feet, ships that float over enemy bases carpet-bombing everything below, invisible stealth units, vehicles that drain enemy energy from opposition networks – more high-tech gubbins than even the old KGB's

Advanced Research Department could have dreamt up.

From the few missions we were given to play, it's too early to say how well this system of unit mutation is going to work. But, like much of *Perimeter*, it's a nifty slant on what most expect out of an RTS these days. So, while at this stage we can't confidently predict whether *Perimeter* is going to offer a winning formula, we can at least confirm that it's going to be an original one. **PV**

Why Don't You?...

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

All the action takes place on worlds that reflect man's inner thoughts, dreams and fears. Which to us seems to set up all kinds of opportunities. Let's start with a planet where your men are all feeling a little randy, cooped up in their barracks away from the womenfolk. Mysteriously, the landscape on the world below is composed of two imposing, majestic peaks, plunging into a cleavage-like valley between them. Thus battle for control of planet Nork begins – who will become king of the hills?

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Gangland is not your everyday real-time strategy game. It offers a totally new gaming style mixing three genres: real-time strategy (RTS), role-playing game (RPG), and simulation (SIM), with a large dose of high paced action thrown in for good measure.

You must move fast in combat. Make tactical use of the environment, use med-kits, reload your guns, crouch and take cover all with the right timing so you stay alive.

So if you think that these pliers are for bending wire or pulling out bent nails, maybe you should think a little differently before you start playing.

See the world through the eyes of a gangster





LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
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Alan Titchmarsh's...

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Martin Korda meets Massive Entertainment and radios in the latest news on this RTS sequel



Looks like it's time to get the spray out again.



Unlike in the original, you can now control individual troops.



The beaches of Scotland are lovely at this time of year.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.groundcontrol2.com
ETA June 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Easy to play but hugely tactical
- Sprawling and stunning 3D maps
- No resource management
- All-new playable alien race



Burning a bit of oil there mate.

AFTER LAST month's extensive preview, you might think you know all there is to know about *Ground Control II*. But think again... We've just played an almost-complete build of the game and found a few surprises lurking in the terrain. Massive Entertainment's CEO Martin Malfisz was there to talk us through the most exciting sci-fi 3D RTS this side of *StarCraft 2*.

Having recently revealed *GCII*'s third race, a nomadic bunch of neckless aliens called the Virones, we asked the sensibly named Martin to tell us a bit more about them. "The Virones are the second playable race and live in clan ships as they no longer have a home planet."

Massive's CEO was reluctant to tell us exactly what part these gnarly-skinned warriors would play in the war between the game's two warring human factions (the evil NSA and the Terran Empire), but we'd wager they've got intentions on your home planet, Morningstar Prime.

Martin demonstrated how these creatures meld different troop types to create more powerful soldiers. During this symbiosis, the units become encased in a

massive green egg, and a new warrior hatches out after half a minute.

Huge emphasis is also being placed on plot and character development. "You follow the story through the eyes of captain Jacob Angelus. It'll be a hero's journey," says Martin. "We believe this will make for a better storyline and allow you to become attached to him. You'll see him grow both in terms of personality and in his relationships with other characters. Occasionally, you'll get to use him as a unit on the battlefield, but mostly he'll act as a commander."

ACTION STATIONS

Having sufficiently grilled Martin, we turned our attentions to the action on-screen. Our mission – to capture an enemy stronghold.

Starting off on a breathtaking canyon ridge, we called down a dropship full of tanks, foot soldiers and mortars (unlike in

the original, you can now command these soldiers individually rather than just in groups). We then pounded the enemy from afar while the tanks rolled slowly in.

As with every unit type, tanks come replete with a unique secondary function – extending armoured shields to allow ground troops to approach the enemy in safety. Deploying these enabled us to gather our troops en masse just outside the NSA's base, while mortar fire suppressed their forces. Then, while we called in another dropship of backup units, the foot soldiers broke cover to infiltrate the base, while our tanks pounded it from outside.

Zooming into the action revealed a titanic struggle, the battle seesawing back and forth as heavy armour was sent skywards by violent explosions and broken bodies littered the floor.

With three months left to tighten the screws on gameplay, *Ground Control II* is already looking like a masterful RTS, with more good ideas than a dozen of its peers. Barring total calamity, the earth will move this June. **PCZ**

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Serf's up...

LORDS OF THE REALM III

Will Porter rounds up some peasants, herds them to an armoury and sends them to die in a muddy French field. The cad...



The French give a good taunting.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Impressions Games

PUBLISHER VU Games

WEBSITE www.impressionsgames.com

ETA March 26

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a 3D, real-time incarnation of the strategy gem of yore
- Simultaneous resource management and battle tactics
- All the famous medieval death machines available
- Multiplayer with all the trimmings



Basingstoke in 1245. A prime target for raping and pillaging.



The lives of these men will be in your hands.



Linda Barker's Medieval DIY disasters were a huge hit.

HISTORY lessons are usually dull: statistics, figures and an array of pointless people doing inadvisable things. Medieval history, on the other hand – now that's something else. Boiling oil, spears in faces and large contraptions designed to hurl lumps of masonry into the castles of fat polygamists are guaranteed to wake you up from your pencil-twirling, window-gazing reverie.

And so we come to the *LOTR* franchise (no, the other *LOTR* franchise). Last seen eight years ago in 2D turn-based form, the game is returning with a real-time clock ticking, 3D models and environs as well as a fully-fledged multiplayer component. Putting you in charge of managing resources, strategies and tactics of various medieval forces (mainly those with a thirst for conquest), it

blends the diplomacy of *Civilization* with all the RTS trimmings of cavalries charging, arrows firing and battering rams pounding.

FEEDING TIME

A recent play revealed a familiar blueprint, yet one smoothed and refined by years of experience. Taking Western Europe from 1066 to about 1430 as its springboard, *LOTR III* sees you trying to appease the church, feed your subjects and maintain control over your errant knights while playing through scenarios like the Norman Invasion, Barbarossa's campaigns in Italy and the 100 Years War. Micro-management is streamlined through various vassals such as knights, burghers and members of the clergy, who provide advice and keep riff-raff at arm's length.

As a power-crazed monarch, you have to balance these different classes of underling depending on the needs of your territories. Some provide extra groats for your bank balance, for example, while others create new armies or provide food for your existing troops.

Speaking of which, you've got more than enough metal to make the foreign devils quake in their ill-fitting boots. There are eight basic unit types, plus an extra 'speciality' troop for each of the eight in-game nationalities and a full complement of siege weapons. These include catapults, battering rams, scaling ladders, trebuchets, siege towers, boiling oil and ballistae. Battles take place in real time, so resource management runs alongside your warmongering, and you can jump in and out of skirmishes as you want (putting faith in your military tacticians' humble AI).

SOUNDS FAMILIAR

The multiplayer contingent isn't the tacked-on afterthought you might expect either, with up to eight players duking it out and carving up lumps of Europe. Another notable feature, established partly from conjecture and partly from a straw poll in the office, is that it's the voiceover guy from Reeves and Mortimer who guides you through the tutorial. We wave our pikes in anticipation. [B]



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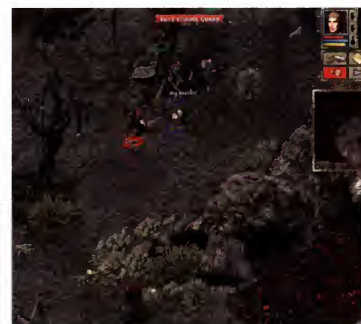
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I smell the presence of the *Diablo*...

Combat is a lot more tactical, which is bad news for stupid people everywhere.



Inventory-tastic.



Guards to kill aplenty in the citadel...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Larian Studios
PUBLISHER Digital Jesters
WEBSITE www.beyond-divinity.com
ETA April 9 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Follow-up to top-notch RPG *Div Div*
- Extended character customisation
- Random quest generation via battlefields
- Ability to summon helpful 'pets'



Psalms On Sunday presents...

BEYOND DIVINITY

**The follow-up to the most stupidly named game of 2002 is here.
 Chris Anderson follows the path of righteousness**

CV



LARIAN STUDIOS

Headquartered in Gant, Belgium, Larian is a young game-maker dedicated to making fun titles in established genres. The freelance team even includes our own Rhianna Pratchett, who has penned the script and companion novella for the game. Go Rh!

1997 *L.E.D. Wars*. The Larian boys cut their teeth with this drug-themed *Dune 2* clone, winning a few fans with the game's hardcore RTS stylings.

2002 *Divine Divinity*. It may not have looked amazing or done anything remarkably new, but this isometric RPG proved a surprise hit in 2002, providing countless hours of enjoyable goblin bothering.

BEFORE we get started, let's make one thing clear: this is not a sequel. *Beyond Divinity* may pick up where the first game left off, but it's no sequel. Nor can it safely be called an upgrade, given that the same game engine is in use. If you really insist on pigeonholing it you could call it a stand-alone semi-sequel, offering a full new storyline, but with the kind of changes in game mechanics you might expect from a sequel. Confused yet? You should be.

Basically, *Beyond Divinity* is one for the fans. It's for all those who played the immense first game and remarkably enough, were left wanting more. As it happens, I can be counted among that number, so when playable preview code for *Beyond Divinity* turned up in the office

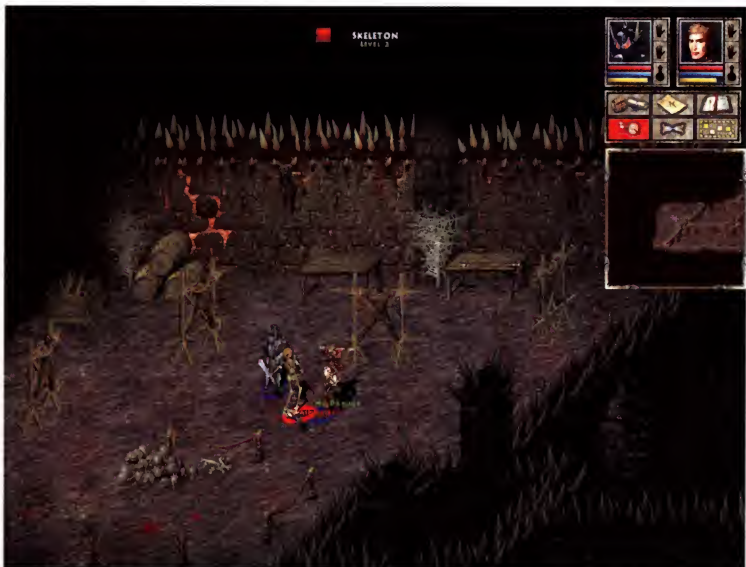
I leapt on it like a hungry orc on a man-burger. Or something. In any case, let's take a close look at what Larian has been working on since the release of the original game.

SOUL BROTHERS

The first thing to leap out at you when the game loads up is the fact that you're not alone. *BD* uses a party-based system, though for the most part your group consists of just two people: you, and a Death Knight to whom you've somehow been magically soul-forged. Since neither of you are happy with this turn of events, the rest of the game is spent trying to remove the curse and escape from the Death Knight's universe back to your own.



Underneath that mess there's a fight going on.



Bony cannon fodder – what would we do without them?

BATTLEFIELDS

HEY LOOK, A GAME WITHIN A GAME

Brand new to the *Divinity* experience is Battlefields, a random quest generator that gives you an opportunity to try things you wouldn't dare try in the 'real' game. You can also use this feature to strengthen your characters if they're having a hard time at any particular point. Drop them into the fray, run through a few quests, kill a few hundred undesirables then pop back into the main scenario with your newly beefed-up hero and suddenly it's a walk in the park. This is cheating, of course, and if you do this you should be thoroughly ashamed of yourself – but don't worry, we won't tell anyone.



Create random quests to beef up your characters.



The mythical gates of Stevenage.

It's immediately apparent that the addition of another party member not only makes combat easier, but allows for a much more tactical approach to battles. Right from the first dungeon you're plunged headfirst into battle, where the Death Knight proves to be more than a little handy, seeing off multiple enemies while you faff about with the new game controls.

Pausing the action with the space key quickly becomes essential, as with two characters to control rather than one, your tactical options are broadened. As such, *Beyond Divinity* appears to offer greater depth in combat than its predecessor.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS...

The ante in battle is upped further with the introduction of extensive skill choices. Whereas the first title offered various classes to choose from, *BD* goes much further and gives you skill choices within each individual class. Choosing a warrior class, for example, will open up further

takes all the damage while you hide at the back casting spells or shooting arrows.

HOLIER THAN THOU

On the basis of what we've seen so far, *Beyond Divinity* has every chance of improving on what was already a very solid game. The graphics may be a source of disappointment to some people, as they're pretty much the same as the original. There are (allegedly) graphical improvements, but even squinting hard and staring at the screen for ages didn't reveal any evidence of this.

As it stands the new character development options should go a long way towards retaining your interest in your characters till the end of the game, and the storyline, while somewhat cheesy, allows for a fairly comic relationship between the two main characters and never takes itself too seriously (good on ya, Rhianna). Keep your eyes peeled and look out for a full review in the next month or two. [\[E\]](#)

"The addition of a party member allows for a more tactical approach to battles"

choices, like specialising in dealing extra damage or increasing the probability of critical hits; whereas dress-wearing wizard types will discover their own skill trees and various spell specialisations.

If you wish, you can pause the game and explore all the skill trees at your leisure, or you can do what we did and browse through all the skills while the Death Knight runs about twatting everything he comes across.

As you may have guessed, the Death Knight seems a little over-powered in this early version, but there's every possibility the beta was intended to make us feel good about ourselves, so allowed for a large degree of incompetence on the part of the player. Whatever the case, he's quite a formidable companion, and the best way to set him up appears to be as a warrior/tank type who stays up front and



REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

NEW BEGINNINGS



■ SENIOR REVIEWS ED Martin Korda

▲ Well, this it is. After almost four-and-a-half years on staff here at *PC ZONE*, I've decided (after much cogitation and deliberation) to call it a day. This issue will be my last as a full-time member of *PC ZONE*, after which I'll be moving on to the murky world of freelance journalism.

Having spent seven issues freelancing for the mag after a week's work experience in 1999, I joined the team on issue 87. The last 53 issues have been one hell of a ride, and I've loved every minute. I hope that you've enjoyed reading the mag during this time as much as I have working on it, and while this is a goodbye from me in my capacity as senior reviews editor, it's not a final farewell as I'll still be involved in the mag in a big way. Thanks to you all for reading and your emails of support over the past few years and I hope that you continue to enjoy *PC ZONE* for many years to come.

Speaking of changes, I'm going to make my last act as head of the reviews section a decisive one. This month, we've reviewed *Far Cry*, a shooter that's finally taken the next evolutionary step for the genre. *Call Of Duty* was the last great game of the old school of shooters, and *Far Cry* is the first great game of the next generation. Which is why, as of this issue, we're resetting the bar when scoring shooters, starting with a clean slate and installing *Far Cry* as our new benchmark blaster. *CoD* moves down to second, and under the new scoring system it would receive 89 per cent.

I now hand you and the section over to the hugely capable hands of associate editor Anthony Holden, who'll be taking over next month. Take care of yourselves, and keep the PC gaming faith.



Is the evolution of the FPS finally here? Find out with our world exclusive *Far Cry* review on page 64.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets

reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA Football 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Far Cry

What are you currently playing?

What's your favourite Korda moment of the last five years?

The trance-like state he entered while playing roulette on the ferry to Amsterdam. A scary sight



JAMIE SEFTON

TOCA Race Driver 2 preview, *Painkiller* preview and *Far Cry*

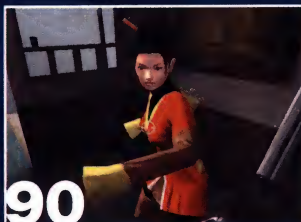
Martin pummeling me in the chest to the beat of the Slovakian national anthem



64

FAR CRY

The evolution of the FPS?



90

RE-RELEASES

Older games at new prices



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FEEDBACK

Your love/hate points of view



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REALITY CHECK

Hill meets the Crafty Cockney

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

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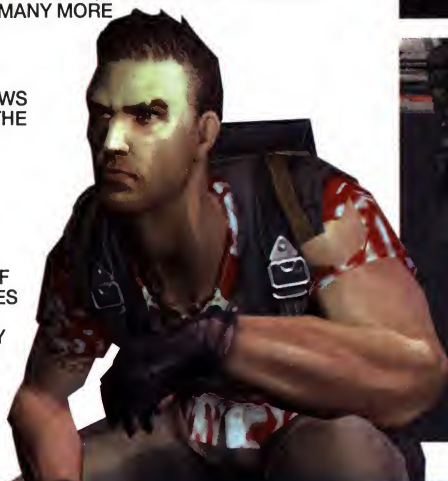
INCLUDING *TOTAL WAR: MEDIEVAL BATTLE COLLECTION*, *NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2*, *PROJECT EDEN*, *COMBAT MISSION*, *COSSACKS*, *EUROPEAN WARS*, *COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN* AND MANY MORE

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YOUR VIEWS, REVIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE LATEST GAMES

94 **REALITY CHECK**

THE LAST IN THE CURRENT SERIES OF REALITY CHECK SEES STEVE HILL TAKING ON THE LEGENDARY ERIC BRISTOW AT DARTS. SID WADDELL PROVIDES THE COMMENTARY



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80



MARTIN KORDA

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero and *Unreal Tournament 2004*

Too many good times to list, but the Greek embassy debacle and E3 2002 are right up there



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Unreal Tournament 2004 and *PlanetSide*

It has to be the time he thought he'd burst a bollock at Magic Mountain...



PAUL PRESLEY

PlanetSide, *X2: The Threat* and *Mafia*

Boozing in an extraordinarily posh country hotel before trashing the rooms



WILL PORTER

Far Cry and *Battlefield Vietnam*

Being repeatedly lifted off the ground while 'researching' the drinking feature



STEVE HILL

Visual Pinball - The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle

When we both met Mr T at E3 2002



RICHIE SHOEMAKER

PlanetSide and *Homeworld 2*

The golden years when he was a staff writer and would make us all cups of tea



FAR CRY



■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Crytek | ETA: March 26 | www.farcry-thegame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Will Porter learns that worse things can happen on a beach than donkey rides

RIGHT THEN. Settle down at the back. I haven't got time for the normal pleasantries, banter and 'a funny thing happened to me on the way to the office'

INPERSPECTIVE

HALF-LIFE

Reviewed Issue 71, Score 95%
Far Cry won't be as big as *Half-Life*, but it can be ranked alongside it as a great step in the pursuit of gaming goodness.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Reviewed Issue 104, Score 90%
If you want truer freeform gameplay *Operation Flashpoint* is a good buy, although there are far less mutants and evil scientists.

anecdotes. I've got to tell you about my new favourite game and have a mere three-thousand words to do it.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai he only had ten salient lifestyle tips to offer – and from these, two world religions were given their foundations. I come to you from the beaches of Micronesia with a clipboard, Powerpoint presentation and jar of promotional lollipops to spread the good word about *Far Cry*: the first game to truly show us the limitless possibilities of next-generation PC titles and the first game that has ever made me fall out my chair in

fear after a particularly violent monster attack (no joke).

Imagine *Jurassic Park*. Not 'Wow there's a T-Rex in San Diego!' *Jurassic Park*, but proper, Spielberg *Jurassic Park*. A place where the natural order has been built over and ignored; where concrete, electric fences and enclosures pollute the streams and mountainsides. A place of brewing tension. A place where man has pushed the boundaries of science that one notch too far, and where everything is about to spectacularly collapse in on itself. Now add a hefty dose of *Die Hard*, a spot of *Predator*,

a dash of *The Island Of Doctor Moreau*, the military camp out of *M*A*S*H* and a sexy journalist with a cracking arse and you have what approaches the vibe of the most exciting shooter since *Half-Life*.

DOWN TO IT

You are Jack Carver, owner of a boat charter business in the islands of Micronesia. Handily enough, you're also an ex-marine badass who kills without emotion, loves to make things explode and has the ability to carry more ammunition than all of So Solid Crew put together.

Your services have been commandeered by the

aforementioned sexy journalist Val Cortez (who may or may not have a shady back history with the CIA), who takes you to a restricted island before promptly getting nabbed by a rabble of swarthy mercenaries like the useless sexy stereotype she is. Your mission is to rescue her, and in the process uncover the nefarious goings on in and around the island of Cabutu.

That's the standard opening blurb done and dusted, let's move on to the important shit. First off, as you well know, the game is gorgeous. Whether you're standing on a beach in the



midday sun, staring down your sniper scope at the swaying foliage at dusk or watching the moonlight twinkling over a gently lapping shore, the game looks so beautiful it may as well be caressing your eyeballs.

The outdoor environments just seem natural; rocks, valleys, trees and sandbanks have clearly been strategically placed to ensure memorable firefights, but it truly feels as if they've been put there by the hand of God rather than a clever German. The 'wow' factor of this game is colossal; parrots fly from tree to tree, shoals of fish flit about underneath piers and green fireflies buzz around the muzzle of your rifle at night. Static, it looks great; moving, it looks like the Garden of Eden itself.

I WANNA BE FREE

Before we can go any further, we'll have to cover the freeform stylings of the game – partly because everything else hinges on this and partly because I like to get you hot and sweaty. Within limits, you can attain your goals in whichever way you want: you're given a waypoint to navigate to or a base to infiltrate, but the meat and gravy of your assault is up to you. There'll be pointers



If enemies hear an alarm or see a flare, they'll send in the cavalry.

for you to show the different options available (jeeps, hang-gliders, sniper rifles and the like being left around the place) but whether you sneak, kill, blow up, snipe or simply avoid the confrontation is up to you. Technically this isn't freeform, although it gives a bloody good illusion of giving you freedom and choice within the standard

viewpoint. This is pretty tricky to explain, so I have a good example with me.

FLIP THE SWITCH

At one point, quite early on in the game, you have to retrieve some documents from the massive rusting hulk of a WWII aircraft carrier. There are numerous ways to get on board

in the first place, but what really flicked my intrigue-switch happened after I'd grabbed the info and was making my escape.

Doyle, a friendly insider who whispers hints and tips through your radio, told me to head to the top of the carrier where I could nick a boat. Once on the deck, I found myself running, hiding and sniping around crates and boxes in a lengthy and thrilling exchange of bullets. Flush with the spoils of victory, I sauntered over two bridges hanging on chains towards my boat-to-be and was promptly exploded by an attack helicopter swooping into the bay. Load last checkpoint.

The next time I tried the deck I had a bit more of an extensive hunt about, and (joy of joys) I found a machine-gun placement which I merrily used to make short work of the adversaries that had previously made my life so hard.

All was fine and dandy until I realised that my over-zealous

use of the machine gun had broken through all the chains on the swinging bridges, prompting a quick rethink and a series of jumps, ducks and leaps to get to the boat. When I got there, I shot out the chains holding it 60ft above the water, watched it fall into the drink and was suddenly shot in the head by the helicopter's gunner. Load last checkpoint again. Grrr.

THIRD TIME LUCKY?

On my third reincarnation I got to thinking. Why not just decide against going up on deck and getting dicked? Why not ignore Doyle's advice and simply jump into the sea, swim to the beach and snipe out the chains attached to the boat? Doing this not only skipped the lengthy firefight on the deck, but also opened up the most cathartic experience I got out of the game: zooming around in the dinghy, dodging the low-flying helicopter and eventually



That's gotta be hot.

BREATHE WITH ME



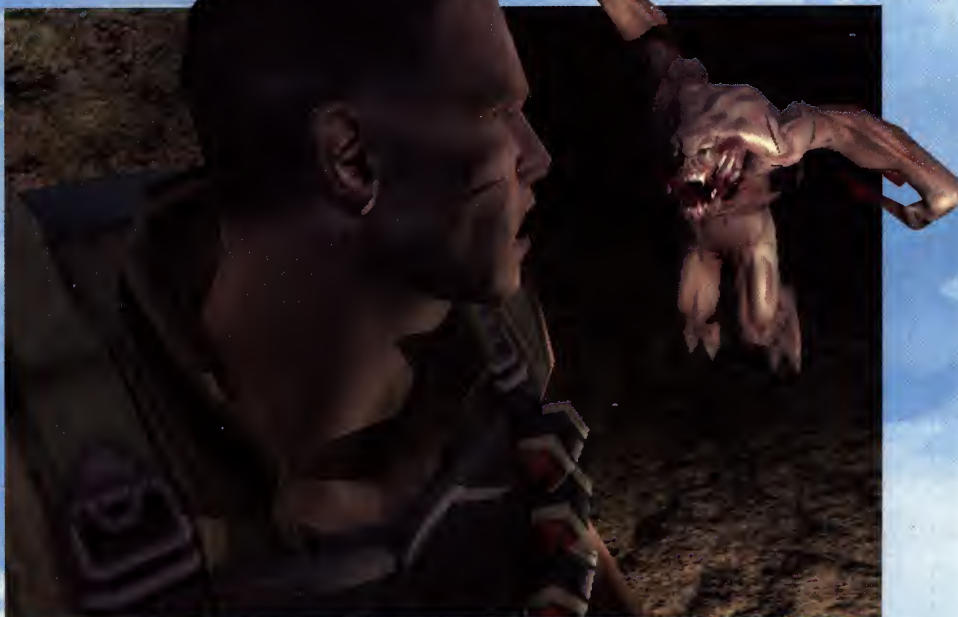
"He's in the trees! He's in the trees!"

NO MATTER HOW FIT YOU ARE, IT'S GOOD TO TAKE A BREATH

Even muscle-bound hunks get out of puff, and Jack Carver is no exception. Tapping the sprint button and extended periods underwater will get him knackered just like anyone else, and if you're a bit tired then the chances of you getting away from a superhuman Trigen charging you at full speed is pretty unlikely. Another neat feature in the game is being able to take a deep breath when you're sniping by tapping the space bar. This provides you with that little bit extra precision when you're trying to blow off a baddie's face at a distance of half a mile.



The Oxford vs Cambridge boat race hits new heights.



Far Cry's cut-scenes are fast-paced and flashy, but fairly hard to follow.



Jeeps come equipped with rocket launchers and drinks holders.

blowing it out of the sky, shouting the words "Die! Die you f**ker! Didn't expect that did you! Ha Ha!"

This is a tiny example of the branching nature of *Far Cry*. You have to get from point A to point B, but the actual path you take is up to you, the armaments available to you and wherever your adversaries' AI takes you. Countless times you'll have surveyed an enemy camp nestling in a valley and devised a definitive plan of action. You'll be mentally prepping yourself with where you have to go and what you have to do, only for an enemy to spot you on your approach, send up a flare and call in two

attack choppers, a jeep and a bevy of brawny mercenaries intent on wringing your neck. Every time you reboot a

marines. Here, enemy mercenaries flank you and draw your fire while their comrades sneak up behind you, run for reinforcements, destroy vehicles before you can nick them, send up distress flares and every so often run rings around you. They know when to hide, where to hide and when to run.

There are faults, as you'd expect – every once in a while you'll be taking pot-shots at an enemy whose only response is to stand on a hill flexing his muscles – but these are fairly rare. There are even jungle encounters where you hear the mercenary leaders shouting

soldiers running all over the shop, there isn't a wussy quicksave function. Your finger will be wavering over the F6 button, but it's no good. You save at checkpoints here or not at all.

It just proves, as I've said all along, quicksaves are for girls. I played through the game on medium difficulty and died at a rate that would surprise a swarm of May-flies. With 'Challenging', 'Veteran' and 'Realistic' settings still to play, I'm guessing I'll soon have been

killed so many times that the cold taste of death will no longer be quite so bitter.

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW One of the most innovative features in *Far Cry*, meanwhile, is the tagging system that's worked the miracle of making stalwart FPS feature, binoculars, something that you regularly use. Let's say you're scouting out an island for an imminent assault in your stolen boat; your binoculars will automatically lock on to targets on the beach

"I played through the game on medium difficulty and died at an amazingly rapid rate"

level, events pan out slightly differently, and this is perhaps the beauty that lies within an already stunning arrangement.

IT AIN'T REAL, BUT...

And so we come to the AI. The last time I was so overwhelmed by FPS enemy AI was the first time I came across the *Half-Life*

orders to their grunts that they actually follow, although the cries of "He's to the left!", "Go round the side" and "Take him! Take him!" are invariably the last things you'll hear.

The game is difficult y'see. Damn difficult. And because of the variable nature of the game and the AI's ability to get its

THE BATTLE CONTINUES ONLINE



Because even scientists can be murderers...

THE BEAUTY OF FAR CRY IS THAT IT'S A GAME THAT'LL JUST KEEP ON GIVING

You can expect a full review of *Far Cry*'s multiplayer contingent in Online Zone soon, but I can assure you that everything is present and correct. There's your bog-standard free-for-all Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch, plus an Assault mode that sees a team trying to take control over another's pad with a cast of snipers, soldiers and bandage-bearing support players.

Also, presumably in deference to the extended shelf-life given to *Half-Life* by the modding community, *Far Cry* has been made eminently approachable for community action. At the time of writing, a massive 1.1 million people have downloaded the *Far Cry* demo, and mods are springing up already – a notable one, *Stunt Island*, making use of the awesome vehicle physics. A map editor is set to be packaged with the full release, and two more advanced code-fiddling programs will be downloadable in March and April.



Shoot the chains. Steal the boat.



Trigens don't look any prettier in the dark.



A mercenary doing the hard work, so you don't have to.



What fresh hell is this?

"The monsters are scary and brilliant, and can leap 25m in one bound"



and once they've been tagged in this way, you can trace their movements and know what state of alert they're in.

So it is, then, that every good *Far Cry* player will try to tag all the men possible before running into the fray, because otherwise you'll be pulverised within seconds. The true joy of the binoc-tagging, though, are the grunts who slip through the net. The ones you don't tag become rogue operatives, sneaking up when you least expect it and scaring the bejesus out of you before coolly blowing you away for the gazillionth time.

PARADISE VROOM

Vehicles are also abundant: buggies, hum-vees, patrol boats and hang-gliders are rife for pilfering. Controls feel a bit 'digital' as opposed to overtly realistic, but there really is no better feeling than careering through the jungle leaving devastation in your wake or timing a missile so that it accurately strikes the bow of any enemy boat.

Moving on from the vehicles,

what about the monsters? Now, I'm not in the habit of giving away spoilers, so I'm not going to go into lavish detail on the Trigen - but I'll tell you enough to get you excited. The monsters are the work of your average insane scientist: some of them can leap about 25m in one bound, they can kill you in two hits and when they want to be, they're bloody scary.

My first major encounter with one of the Squeakers (who turn out to be the weakest variety of Trigen) came after I'd

written the apocryphal words "not particularly scary" in my handy journalistic notebook.

Seconds later, a leg had been spat out of a ventilation duct, two swipes of a claw had killed me and I'd shouted the house down: jamming out my legs, thrusting my swivel chair backwards and leaving me squatting over an empty space like a man who, quite literally, had just shat himself.

My spider-sense is tingling, so I'm guessing that you're not convinced yet. Well, you know

all the bits in *Half-Life* where you come across the marines fighting the Xen beasties? Well, imagine an all-out war breaking out at dawn on a paradise island, with rocket-toting giants (who can take about 30 bullets to the chest without flinching) and mutated blue-skinned soldiers with ridiculously toned leaping and gripping abilities, fighting against tons of heavily



Man on dinghy vs armed attack helicopter. Hmmmm...

UNCHAINED MELODY

FAR CRY PROVES THAT OCCASIONALLY, PHYSICS CAN BE FUN

Barrels roll, giant cylindrical tanks crush unsuspecting enemies, chains supporting heavy metal items are shot out above the mutated heads of the Trigen and rocks fall on see-saw arrangements that hurl mercenaries into the air for a surprise shotgun blast to the chest. Forget Newton's laws of motion, the real fun starts and ends with Jack Carver. The opening levels are a playground for messing about with the *Far Cry* physics engine: punchbags, bamboo curtains and startled pigs are all due for an unsubtle launching. If only science was this much fun in real life.



Wow! I can see my house!



Playing god has never been so much fun.

armoured mercenaries. And you in among it all, friend of none and enemy of everyone.

BACK DOWN TO EARTH

Aside from the foul-mouthed vitriol that's poured out of my mouth every time I've been shot within spitting distance of the next checkpoint, I haven't said a bad word about *Far Cry*, but I

do know a few that I could use.

The game is far and away the best shooter I've played in years, but that doesn't mean it gets away scot-free from any criticism. My main concern is that the indoor sections, which take up about a third of the game, just aren't as good as the outdoor environments.

In real life, your eyes find

it difficult to adjust when you walk out of the blazing sunshine and into a dark room, and that's true here too. When you've experienced the supreme illusion of outdoor freedom *Far Cry* provides, it isn't surprising that you feel a bit stifled when you revert back to the familiar corridor-by-corridor template.

The middle third of the game, which takes place during the night in the build-up to the scintillating Trigen rebellion, lags a little because it strays away from the supreme outdoor assaults that *Far Cry* does best. Then again, some of the best scares and set-pieces come from

facing off against the Trigen within the research complexes and holding areas, so it's hardly a bitter pill to swallow.

Another complaint I could level (although it's a pretty lame thing to pull Crytek up on) is the fact that you have no control over how far you chuck grenades, and scoring kills with them is invariably a matter of luck rather than battle-hardy quick-thinking. A worthier chin-stroker is the story, which may convey the suspense and vibe of *Far Cry* well, but in fact is about as deep as an Ethiopian puddle on a hot day. Cut-scenes are fast and way too hard to follow, and objectives can also be garbled.

What's more, to *Far Cry*, characterisation is something that happens to other people. So if you're hoping to discover anything meaningful within Jack and Val other than the fact that he's hard and she's got breasts, you might be disappointed. (Although you'll probably be too busy blowing helicopters out of the sky to notice.)

EPIPHANY

Far Cry isn't a perfect game, but I stand firm in my opinion that it's the most immersive shooter I've played since *Half-Life*. I didn't jump through the same hoops as everybody else over *Call Of Duty*, admittedly, but the feeling of sitting down and being alternately thrilled, scared and overjoyed hasn't happened to me since that wonderful time in 1998 when I first met Gordon. I doubt that any game could ever quite recreate that moment of losing one's Freeman virginity, but *Far Cry* is the closest I've ever known another game to get.

If hype turns into history, then it'll be eclipsed by *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*, but it remains a bold, thrilling step into the next generation of PC gaming and a sign that great things are about to come our way.



SECOND OPINION

ANTHONY HOLDEN

Young Will Porter, being a wee wisp of a lad whose enthusiasm has yet to be crushed out of him by years of disappointment and betrayal, has a tendency to get a bit carried away sometimes. However, in this case I have to agree with him wholeheartedly. *Far Cry* is not a massive leap in technological terms, but it is a significant step forward in terms of intelligent, lifelike AI and effective marriage of scripted versus freeform gameplay.

As a natural coward and sniper, I'm also a big fan of the game's vast, outdoor environments. With a practical combat range equivalent to one mile, *Far Cry* is quite literally a sniper's paradise. More than that, it's a hugely enjoyable game and an absolute must-play.

Far Cry has lifted the bar so high that most of the shooters in our A-list shouldn't even be mentioned in the same breathe. In deference to the leaps and bounds *Far Cry* has taken over its rivals, and the signs of even greater things afoot, we've even rejigged our scoring system to cater for this new form of shooter excellence.

Whether or not we'll have seen even more impressive feats by the end of the year is yet to be seen. However, what I can say is that *Far Cry* is a bona-fide classic: a technological marvel that's as rewarding as it is beautiful. For the time being at least, it's the beating heart of the first-person shooter. **PC4**

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



"Where's that Goldblum b*st*rd?"

MICRONESIA COULD HAVE BECOME THE NEW ISLA NUBLAR

My *Jurassic Park* musings don't come out of nowhere: *Far Cry*'s origins lie in a tech demo called *X-Isle* that starred a variety of dinos running amok on a paradise island. It was a Crichton-esque lawsuit-baiter starring dinosaurs as opposed to bio-enhanced mutant-things. Now, I like the direction that the game eventually took, don't get me wrong, but I can't help but think that being hunted by raptors with the ingenuity of the soldiers in *Far Cry* would be absolutely superb. A squad of soldiers taking down a rampaging T-Rex with rocket launchers, that would be cool too. Or how about being attacked by Pteranodons while you're hang-gliding? There's a mod in there somewhere. Get busy.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Breathtakingly gorgeous
- ✓ Great AI
- ✓ Superb level design and atmospherics
- ✓ At least 15-20 hours of gameplay
- ✗ Interior levels not quite so hot

93

A sublime experience



Real-time damage doesn't only show off how bad a driver you are, it affects your vehicle's handling too.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

■ £29.99 | Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | ETA: April 2 | www.codemasters.com/colinmcrae04

REQUIRES PIII 750, 256MB and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill gets geared up for another exhilarating season of rally racing

ONCE UPON a time there was a boy called Colin who liked cars. He liked them so much that when he grew up he drove them at high speed under strict competition conditions. Perhaps driven by rage at his

unfortunate choice of name, he drove so fast that he was crowned Champion of the World. It didn't seem to make him happy though, as he permanently sported the countenance of a bulldog licking piss off a thistle. One day, a man from Codemasters gave him some money in return for using his name on a game. He might not have been entirely sure what that entailed, but Colin accepted it gratefully nevertheless. Some witnesses even report a semblance of a smile.

Five years on, Colin is still taking the money – rumoured to

be up to a pound a copy – and the *McRae Rally* series has exceeded all expectations, consistently leaving its opponents in a cloud of dust and other clichés. And for what? A game that simulates driving round rural backwaters in a series of vulgarly decorated over-powered cars. Where's the fun in that?

The fun, of course, is in the ferocious challenge that it presents, clinging to a variety of road surfaces in a frenzied attempt to shave crucial



INPERSPECTIVE

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 85%

One of the best uses of a fiver we can think of.

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE

Reviewed Issue 124, Score 78%

A reasonable contender, but just not as good as *McRae*.



Watch and learn with the excellent replays.



We've got ourselves a flasher here.

seconds off your time. Weaving through the backmarkers in a Grand Prix game or nudging opponents off the road in 'Generic Racer 2' may have its place, but in the hardcore world of professional rally driving, it's all about man, machine and glorious isolation.

GRIST TO THE MILL

Except, of course, for the bloke barking in your ear every five seconds. McRae's name may adorn the box, but in practical terms it's all about the faceless drone sat next to you, i.e. the man with the map. For years, that securely upholstered seat was occupied by Nicky Grist, whose nasal whine has infiltrated the minds of a generation of gamers. Spread the word, the Welshman is no more. Kicked to the kerb by McRae, in comes the

splendidly-named Derek Ringer, his clipped Caledonian intonation providing a refreshing change after years of Grist.

Ringer was actually McRae's original co-driver back in the day. The pair are now reunited and it feels so good that the old in-game magic has been rekindled. And it's worth listening to what Ringer says, as failure to follow the pace notes will rapidly see you wrapped round a tree like so much yellow ribbon. To give him his dues, the boy certainly knows his stuff, unerringly warning of such forthcoming hazards as trees, rocks and discarded Monster Munch packets.

Ringer's commitment must be reciprocated though, and abject concentration is required on the driver's part. Lapse into a fantasy world of your own

imagination, and Ringer's voice becomes distant and undecipherable, much the same experience as watching a programme about home improvement. Mental strength is required, and while I managed to focus my thoughts on fashioning abstract observations for this review (and wondering what's for tea), I fear for those of weaker mind.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

Even for the sound of thinking, there are times when you become acutely aware of the futility of the activity – driving a pretend car round a pretend track for hours on end – and it does briefly cross your mind that it might be a bit dull. When this happens, the best remedy is to bang the camera into cockpit view, at which point your

stomach lurches like you're strapped into Alton Towers' finest. Every bump in the road becomes a perilous obstacle, and if you haven't much gaming experience, you could find yourself committing the cardinal

sin of lurching around in your seat. As for the bumper-cam view, it may be favoured by the purists, but there's the nagging thought that if you're going to choose a nice-looking car, you might as well be able to see it.

SOUND AS A POUND

HEARING IS BELIEVING

Colin McRae Rally 04 undeniably looks and feels like driving a rally car, but thanks to computer wizardry it now also sounds like driving a rally car. The first game to feature a revolutionary technique for super-realistic acoustic simulation using Creative Labs' EAX 4.0 Advanced HD™ audio, it accurately simulates sound reflections from all around you via the SoundBlaster Audigy or Audigy2 soundcard.

For instance, sound reflected from a stone wall inches from your wing mirror will sound very different to the acoustics generated by a distant snowdrift.

Throw in the obscene GigaWorks S750 speakers, and it's a frankly terrifying experience. We've been on enough corporate days to know what a rally car sounds like from the inside, and this is terrifyingly accurate. If you've never driven through a thunderstorm in Japan, then this is as close as you're going to get. Luckily, the old dear who lives above me is as deaf as a post. Or at least she soon will be. What's that you say?



"For years, the man with the map in the securely upholstered seat was Nicky Grist. Spread the word, the Welshman is no more"



This time around, you're not just limited to driving the Ford Focus.



The Super Stage is the closest you get to seeing another car.

And there are plenty of shiny cars to drool over. *McRae 3* was rightly criticised due to the fact that to compete in a championship, you had to drive the Ford Focus, Colin's employer at the time. Now freed from his contract (or indeed any contract), there's an open field to choose from, with championships up for grabs in both the four-wheel and two-wheel drive categories. In the traditional fashion, success unlocks further vehicles, and

there's enough vehicular titillation to whip the average *Fast Car* reader into an automotive frenzy.

As well as an array of contemporary rally cars, there are also a slew of classic '80s motors to unveil, many of which were withdrawn from active service due to the inordinate number of fatalities. It's a grim statistic, but they're fully drivable here, with the added bonus of being unlikely to cause decapitation. A few 'comedy'

vehicles have also been thrown into the mix, such as perennial vegan-mobile the Citroën 2CV, and the favoured mode of transport for wolf-whistling *Sun* readers, the white Transit van (facts courtesy of Pigeonholes-R-Us). Neither is particularly suitable for off-road action, but they do provide a brief respite from the extremely dry nature of the game. However, you don't buy a *Colin McRae* game for laughs – just look at his face – and fans will be pleased

"A few 'comedy' vehicles have also been thrown in, such as perennial vegan-mobile the Citroën 2CV"




WALKTHROUGH →




ONLY THE LONELY

Fancy some new ceramic brakes or a set of advanced dampers? You'll have to earn them first with a series of tests between rallies. Pass them and you're awarded with a new part. This is *Colin McRae Rally 04's* way of making upgrading your car more interactive and fun, and wouldn't you know it, it works too.



04 testing
ceramic dampers

1 Absolutely leather the dampers within a set time, and you'll get to keep them. Nice.




3 Here's another test, involving stopping within a certain area. Didn't he do well?

Dampers
The damper can increase spring control by 10% and is very effective on rough road conditions.

UPGRADES
C. network ENTER ON ESCAPE BUS
Driver's View
Gearbox Brakes
Advanced Dampers
Quartermaster
Wheel Traction Tyres

P1
finland
best time
a full stage

2 And look, there they are. It doesn't get much better than that. It's like money (or dampers) for nothing.



04 testing
ceramic dampers

4 A shiny new set of brakes is yours to keep forever... You lucky, lucky bastard.



SECOND OPINION

As is always the problem with a long-running series in this genre, there's only so many new features you can add and improve on from the previous game. The good news is that *Colin McRae Rally 04* is the best rally game I've ever played. But it's only a little better than its predecessor.

Graphically it's slightly superior and sounds like a dream, but the best new feature for me is the ability to choose which team you want to drive for. The physics are also impressive, although on occasion they do still prove a tad unbelievable – a real shame, as otherwise it's among the most realistic driving experiences available on the PC. If you own the last one, then think hard about shelling out again, but for diehard rallying enthusiasts, it's as essential as an orange cagoule and a Thermos flask.

to learn that it's still a deadly serious business.

WHAT'S ANOTHER YEAR?

As for new stuff, the game is somewhat limited by the genre, as the developers don't really have the option to strap some rocket launcher to the bonnet. There is an online element, but obviously at the time of writing it wasn't up and running. (We'll be taking a look as soon as the game goes on sale.)

Otherwise, it's a case of evolution not revolution, and with *Rally 3* released less than a year ago, many of the subtleties will be lost to the untrained eye. Much of the tweaking has gone into the handling, with the car now reacting to the road surface more realistically, rather than behaving as an amorphous blob. Of course, the handling is what has always elevated the series above the mire, and it's as exquisite as ever here, with the numerous road surfaces reacting accordingly with your choice of tyre and set-up.

As for under the bonnet shenanigans, it's kept to a minimum – even the most mechanically inept buffoon should be able to get by. Each championship rally is preceded by a Shakedown, whereby you get to hammer the car round a section of track in order to see if the handling is to your liking. You can then tamper with various aspects of the car's set-



The physics are impressive, if not perfect.



Did we mention that the windscreen effects are superb?



Hope the gritters were out last night.

up, but it's a slippery slope to clamber on to. Once you start tweaking, there's always a sense of nameless dread that you've set something up wrong, or that a slightly different alignment would make a difference. It's almost too much to bear, and the safest option is probably to stick with the default settings.

THE DAMAGE DONE

As the rules of rallying stipulate, repairs can be carried out on your car after every other stage, so it's a good idea not to utterly destroy it from the off as you'll find yourself limping round in disgrace later on. That said, it's worth giving it at least one good

thrashing simply to see the damage model in full glorious effect. Shattered glass, crumpled bodywork and wobbly wheels are all in full effect, with black smoke billowing from the crippled engine. And our favourite bit? The moment when the bonnet dislodges itself from its moorings and simply flies over your head – that makes us feel giddy.

Of course much of this will be familiar to owners of the previous incarnation, and with graphical advancements slowly reaching something of a plateau, the layman would struggle to tell the two games apart. In fact *Colin McRae 2* still looks passable on a decent

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Where is everybody?

ONLY THE LONELY

Yes, we know it's a real ale hardcore rally game, but it would still be nice to race against other cars, you know, unofficially, just for fun. Admittedly, there is the Super Stage, but that doesn't really count. The developer managed to include proper races in *McRae 2* with aplomb, making that arguably the defining version of the game. And with the online facility of *04*, there could have been scope for something joyous. But it's just you, on your own, in your underpants. Welcome to my world.



You'd better get that front suspension checked out mate.

machine. The original game might look a bit shabby were we to dig it out, but essentially, the 'core gameplay experience' remains identical over half a decade on. That's what fans of the series clearly want though, and *04* delivers more of the same in reasonably spectacular style. With a shitload of tracks and cars there's almost unlimited playtime to be had, and it's a game that you could dip into indefinitely.

However, we find that it's a game that you binge on rather than establish a long-term relationship with. The same happened with *McRae 3*, leading to a week of wide-eyed nausea before being tossed into the cupboard of doom. The cycle was repeated when *04* came out on console, leading to many a late night in front of the telly. And now *Colin* has returned to stalk the PC, causing many fevered hours of staring into the middle

distance while stabbing at the keyboard or turning the wheel.

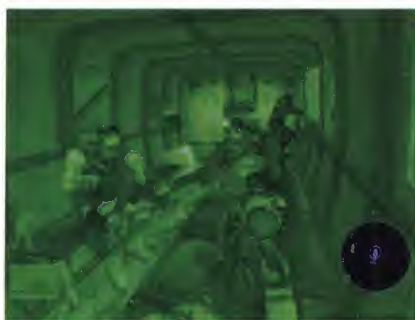
Ultimately, if you've played any of the previous *McRae Rally* games, you'll know exactly what you're getting here: intense rally action that pisses all over the rest from an extremely great height. And with *Richard Burns Rally* currently looking like a PSone game, it looks like *McRae* has got a lot of piss left in him. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

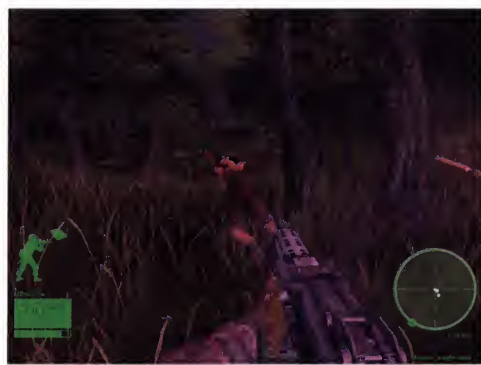
- ✓ Immaculate handling
- ✓ Unlimited gameplay
- ✓ Great damage model
- ✗ Seen it all before
- ✗ A lonely experience

84

It wasn't broken, so it ain't been fixed



Join the SAS in the fight against terrorism, gawd bless 'em an' no mistake gunner.



"The jungle encounters are enjoyably camp and sometimes quite intense"



Those drug barons sure like to get high.



He'd better hope this guy isn't called Private Pyle.

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN – TEAM SABRE

■ £19.99 | Dev: Ritual | Pub: Novalogic | ETA: Feb 13 | www.novalogic.com

REQUIRES PIII 733, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and an ADSL Internet connection

REQUIRES FULL VERSION OF DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

The latest in the *Delta Force* series has been coded by the team behind *Elite Force II* – so we thought we'd use our own elite reviewer, *Richie Shoemaker*...

DESPITE the chaos in our lives, it's heartening to know there are still things we can rely on to keep us grounded. The sun setting, the relegation of at least two newly-promoted Premiership clubs and the unalterable truth that *Delta Force* games have never really pushed out any gameplay boundaries.

Despite this fact though, hundreds of thousands of people still buy the annual upgrade. The problem is, there's usually very little to differentiate one *Delta Force* release from the next, so what is there here to compel you to buy this game?

OLD HAT

It's not the graphics, as once again the 3D engine looks about three years behind the times. Neither is it the setting, which has been done to death a squillion times – not only by other games, but by previous *Delta Force* efforts too.

The multiplayer games, though, are a lot of fun – and the game's simplicity make them a joy to play. But if you're a hardcore military nut, *Operation Flashpoint* may be more your thing. And if you like squad-level action, why not try *Ghost Recon*?

In comparison to these two games, *Team Sabre* does look a bit cheap, with its clichéd characters and overly dramatic action. However, we're always willing to judge each game on its individual merits, and despite the shortcomings here, there's still a fair amount of fun to be had in *Team Sabre*. Although the Iran-based missions are at times on the drab side, the jungle encounters are enjoyably camp and sometimes even quite tense.

In one mission in particular, I was ordered to help secure a base as enemy soldiers advanced on all sides. Instead, I bounded off screaming into the undergrowth, heavy machine-gun spitting cases of fiery death. And as the body count rose, my speakers read my thoughts and blurted out to any enemy AI who might be listening: 'You wanna piece of me?!' Brilliant.



Whatever you do, don't shoot the boat...

Not that we're suggesting you go out and buy *Team Sabre*, you understand. But if you're already a fan with a copy of *Black Hawk Down*, then you'll be sure to enjoy this add-on. Can't say we're that impressed with the new weapons or the overhyped price tag, but the missions – multiplayer especially – are numerous and sporadically fun.

NOTHING TO SEE HERE...

If, on the other hand, your experiences with *Delta Force* have turned you on to bigger and better games, then be aware there's absolutely nothing here that would cause you to shift your allegiance. Despite the

addition of *Team Sabre*, *Delta Force* still remains inferior to many of the deeper, more complex and better-looking competitors out there. **PC**

INPERSPECTIVE

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Reviewed Issue 104, Score 90%

If *Delta Force* is *Command & Conquer*, *Flashpoint* is its *Total War*. Not as mindlessly enjoyable perhaps as *DF*, but far more involving, expansive and rewarding in the long run.

GHOST RECON

Reviewed Issue 110, Score 86%

You can pick this up for less than a tenner now, and yet it still looks and plays better than all the *Delta Force* games put together. Go figure.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Quite fun online, as ever
- ✓ Jungle missions are well done
- ✗ Dated engine
- ✗ Simplistic gameplay
- ✗ Crass and derivative

63

Same as it ever was

Combining Real-Time Strategy and First Person Shooter,
SAVAGE: The Battle For Newerth delivers the next level in multiplayer gaming.

JOIN THE BATTLE FOR NEWERTH



In a violent age, eons from now, nomad hunters roam the earth inflicting cruelty on the beasts and creatures of the world. A daily struggle ensues, man against beast, for the very basic natural resources that nurture life.

Each race has its own style of battle, its own leader, and its own way to victory.

Which side are you on?

**"Savage, the most innovative game of the year,
is a crazy idea that somehow works."**

NEW YORK TIMES

"Savage edges close to perfection" IGN



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Join the community at www.savageeurope.com



Is this a card game? Why yes, it is...

ETHERLORDS II

■ £29.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Nival Interactive | ETA: March 5 |
www.etherlords.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Pokémon with goblins? Chris Anderson's gotta smite 'em all

WHEN THE original *Etherlords* arrived on the scene two years ago, it caused a bit of a stir. Mainly because it was the first turn-based strategy game set in a fantasy universe that didn't feature graphics straight from Satan's bottom. Two years later, it's back – and while the visuals haven't changed a great

deal, they still look as good as they did two years ago. No doubt you'll be wondering what *has* changed, what can be counted as new and what the hell the developers have been doing for the last

two years. The answer, in a nutshell, is 'not a lot'.

NO-BRAINER

That said, the gameplay has been slimmed down somewhat in *Etherlords II*. The traditional top-down turn-based adventure and resource gathering section is gone, replaced by simplified real-time exploration. The developer claims it wanted to take some of the complexity out of the game, but what it's actually done is taken *all* the

complexity out. There's very little to do now between battles except follow a linear path, talking to the occasional NPC, buying spells in shops and tiresomely picking up whatever resources are left in your tracks. The entire game is now geared towards getting you into the next battle with a minimum of fuss.

This in itself may have been acceptable if it wasn't for the fact the adventure interludes are as dull as they are unavoidable, and the introduction of some of the

worst voiceovers ever in a PC title certainly doesn't help either.

The actors who supplied the voices appear to change their minds mid-sentence as to whether they're English, Scottish, Irish or just some wacky hybrid of all three. What's more, while it's fairly hilarious the first time you hear them, you'll soon find yourself turning off the sound till you get to the combat sections.

Unfortunately, these NPCs are key to the game's rather predictable storyline. The narrative varies depending on which hero you're playing, but basically amounts to the fact someone has invaded your

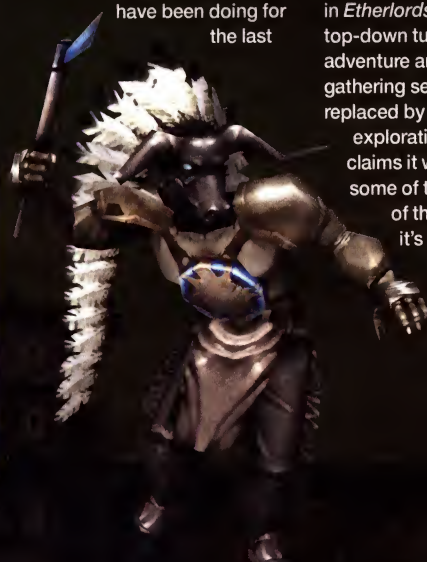
INPERSPECTIVE

ETHERLORDS

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 87%
 If you liked the resource management of the first game, stick with that. If combat is literally all you want, *Etherlords II* is for you.

MAGIC: THE GATHERING – BATTLEGROUND

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 63%
 Exactly the same concept, but with real-time combat instead of turn-based. Which is a little odd, but still compelling for a while.



“The developer claims it wanted to take some of the complexity out of the game, but what it's actually done is taken *all* the complexity out of the game”



Killer plants. So original.



No, we have no idea what that thing is either.



As you can see, the graphics are still fantastic.

territory and it's up to you to sort them out. Yes, it really is that simple.

GET YOUR KICKS

The adventure sections use a top-down view that you can rotate slightly and zoom a little, but it's fair to say the camera angles are a great example of how not to make a viewpoint for a computer game. Generally

speaking, the new exploration section is pretty close to something that rhymes with 'trap'. Thankfully, most of your time will be spent away from this mess doing what comes naturally: killing things for kicks.

The good news is the combat is as good as it ever was, but



Landscapes are again varied and lush.

again, this is mainly because it's identical to how it was before. If you missed the first game, we're talking classic turn-based spell-casting here, as you pit your hero against a variety of magic-using opponents and try to reduce their hit points to zero. The depth and strategy of the game comes through the huge selection of spells you're able to choose from, ranging from defensive walls and simple summoning spells to spectacular asteroid strikes. Acquiring and collecting these can become bloody addictive – and there are over 300 of the buggers – though you may soon tire of summoning endless rats and bats.

IN FOR A SPELL

The other big draw is the new online multiplayer mode. With both one-off duels and grand elimination-style tournaments available, the online game has potential to add longevity and depth to *Etherlords II*. Then again, we can't help but feel that only Germans and the terminally bored will be hardcore enough to bother, but feel free to prove us wrong.

All things considered, *Etherlords II* feels like a far less weighty package

KINGS AND CASTLES

THE STRUGGLE FOR TERRITORY IS NO MORE

As has already been mentioned elsewhere in the review, the overhead map sections are now greatly simplified. This means taking control of/defending castles and other points of note are no longer a part of the game. You no longer need to defend vital resources from the enemy, so the strategic side of the campaigns is gone. If you played the first game and remember the tension as you approached high-level enemies on the overhead map while preparing your plans for a takeover, you'll no doubt be disappointed at losing what was for many one of the best aspects of the game. It's all part of the new 'user-friendly' *Etherlords*. Hey, at least they left the combat in...



Defend the castle. Oh no, on second thoughts...

than the original. The graphics are still beautiful compared to most competing games, and *Etherlords II* retains the title of best-looking turn-based combat game on the market. This might be enough for some, but if you liked the strategic elements from the first game, *Etherlords II* may well prove to be a big disappointment. Fortunately, there's a demo kicking around, so we strongly suggest you try before you buy. [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent combat
- ✓ Battle graphics are still stunning
- ✗ The worst voice-overs of all time
- ✗ Terrible camera angles in adventure section
- ✗ Entirely linear outside of combat

70

Etherlords-lite



A teammate has died!

You have 3 teammates left.

Recent teammates killed:
KennyYou killed an Enemy!
Win the round by eliminat

Kenny (RADIO): Fire in the hole!

You bunch of terrorist bastards, you killed Kenny!

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO



■ £24.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Valve/Turtle Rock Studios/Ritual | ETA: March 26 | www.cs-conditionzero.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 96MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Well, it's finally here. Again. **Martin Korda** finds out if it's a case of déjà vu or something completely new

INPERSPECTIVE

BATTLEFIELD 1942:

DELUXE EDITION

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 85%

Containing the original and *The Road To Rome* expansion pack, *BF1942* is one of the finest and fastest growing online team-based shooters currently around. And unlike *Counter-Strike*, it features vehicular combat too.

RAINBOW SIX 3: RAVEN SHIELD

Reviewed Issue 127, Score 84%

If you prefer your team-based shooter a bit slower and more tactical, then look no further than this.

RIGHT, LET'S try this again shall we? But first, cast your mind back to issue 132 of *PC ZONE*. It was the one with the words 'Exclusive Review: *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*' emblazoned on the front cover, replete with a balaclava-clad man about to be unwittingly run over by three helicopters. Inside was a six-page review – or should I say lamentation – about how the game was nothing like we'd expected it to be.

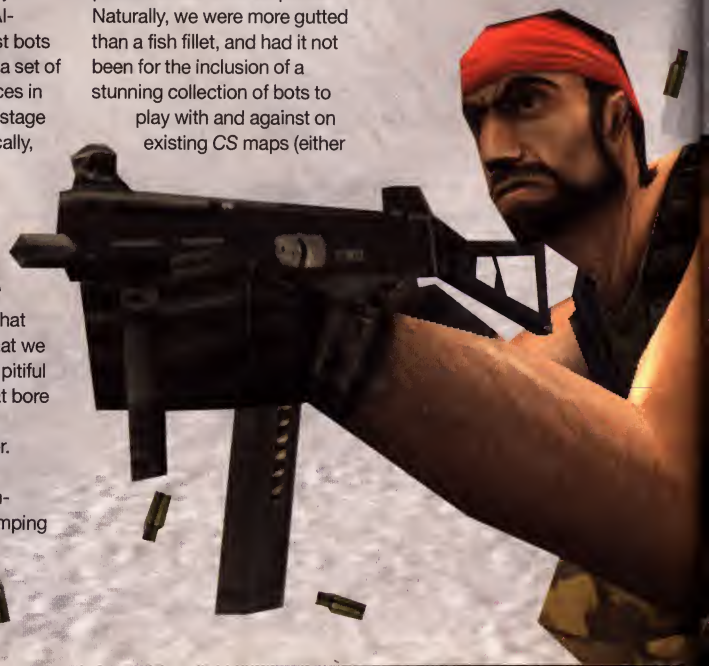
The thing was, right up until the moment the review code plopped onto our desks – and despite development having changed hands from Gearbox to Ritual – we'd been led to believe that *Condition Zero* would comprise of a group of ever-

harder missions, in which you and a team of intelligent AI-controlled counter-terrorist bots would battle it out across a set of maps against terrorist forces in either bomb defusal or hostage rescue missions. So basically, just like online *Counter-Strike*, only with bots and personal tasks to complete in each map.

WHAT'S THIS THEN?

Problem was, that's not what we got at all. No siree. What we got was a collection of 18 pitiful single-player missions that bore almost no resemblance to *Counter-Strike* whatsoever. Pathetic scripted enemy encounters, moronic team-mates and banal ledge-jumping

puzzles were commonplace. Naturally, we were more gutted than a fish fillet, and had it not been for the inclusion of a stunning collection of bots to play with and against on existing CS maps (either





Right, all I have to do now is kill Fo.



Once you die, it's all up to your team.

on your own or with other humans online), it would have scored considerably less.

So what happened to that game, and why are we reviewing *Condition Zero* again a staggering eight months after running it as our lead review? Was it because we were more premature than a two-ounce foetus? Like hell it was.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED...

Thing is, we were sent finished review code by developer Valve, reviewed the game, ran the review and cover and came to the conclusion that the single-player game was about as much fun as drilling holes in your eyeballs.

With a blunt drill head.

So Valve, having read our review, decided to reassess, pulled the game back, handed it to Turtle Rock Studios (the team behind the superb bots I mentioned earlier) and started again. Now, finally – we hope – we have the new, finished and thankfully much improved version of *Condition Zero*.

Making an unwelcome return from before are 12 of the 18 single-player missions we reviewed last time, featured here as 'Deleted Scenes'. So if you're masochistic or have a penchant for basic, scripted shooters, then you can find out what all the lack of fuss was about.

Also, the excellent bots which you can run Internet and LAN servers with are included. These will only be available if you buy *Condition Zero*, so if you're running vanilla CS, you won't be

able to join these bot-populated servers.

BACK TO BASICS

And so we come to what's new about this version of *Condition Zero*. And wouldn't you know it, Valve and Turtle Rock Studios have gone back to the original Gearbox blueprint. Yup, what we have here is a collection of 18 ever-harder maps, where you and a customisable team must battle against terrorists (you're allocated points which you use to recruit troops of varying ability to aid you in each mission). Your task is not only to win by two clear rounds, but to complete personal tasks along the way too.

These tasks vary in difficulty depending on the setting. On 'Easy', you may just have to survive a round and kill a couple of enemies with a certain

IT'S GOOD TO TALK

IT'S ALL ABOUT COMMUNICATION

The true brilliance of *Condition Zero*'s bots doesn't only lie in their lifelike actions – such as moving realistically in formation – but also in what they say. Your team constantly and accurately report what they see, where they think the bomb is, if they need backup and where they are in each level. So expect to hear shouts of 'Double doors, I see the bomber!' 'Bomb's on the ground here' 'The bomb's in A' and 'We'll cover you while you defuse the bomb sir'. What's more, they urge you to complete each mission and start getting twitchy if you only just manage to defuse a bomb in time. It's like playing with a bunch of friends who really want to work together. And with counter-terrorists this good, people should be able to sleep more soundly in their beds each night. Unless they're terrorists, of course.



"Stop hiding behind that shield you coward... Sir!"

weapon. On 'Expert', not only are the enemies fiendishly adept at shooting out your eyeballs from a hundred yards, but your personal mission goals can be staggeringly difficult, such as winning a round in 60 seconds, rescuing all the hostages and killing ten enemies with nothing but a dirty rag and a packet of gravel. Almost that hard, anyway.

OUR SURVEY SAID...

The result is the game we were expecting eight months ago, with bots so intelligent they make your average online player look like a baboon who's been dropped at birth. It's like playing CS in the good old days. Days when teams played together, when each mission was tense and closely fought, not just a free-for-all for glory boys.

What's more, not only are your team-mates incredibly intelligent – each has their own stats for skill, bravery, co-op and a weapon of choice – they always leave the main task (such as defusing the bomb) to you. This way, you always feel you're the hero of the show.

It's a shame it's arrived so late, as this revamped CZ is an excellent package, featuring

some of the best bots we've ever seen. The engine may be dated, the gameplay pretty much unchanged from the online games, some of the meatier new weapons we were promised (such as the LAW Rocket) may be AWOL and it's true we've seen most of the levels before.

But despite all this, *Condition Zero* is still a highly enjoyable piece of software. Valve should be applauded for listening to the criticisms of the original and making amends – had it been sold at £19.99, it would have scored even higher.

If you still love *Counter-Strike*, are new to it or want to train yourself up before getting online, this is an essential purchase. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's the *Condition Zero* we were expecting
- ✓ Some of the best bots we've ever seen
- ✓ You can run CS servers with bots
- ✗ Dated engine
- ✗ Mostly old levels
- ✗ Too few new weapons

83

The game we were expecting eight months ago

"Not only are your team-mates intelligent, they always leave the main task to you – ensuring you feel like the hero of the show"



KILL.SWITCH

■ £9.99 | Pub: Hip Games | Dev: Namco/The Bitmap Brothers | ETA: March | www.killswitch.com

REQUIRES PIII 500/Athlon 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

As another console shooter is hurried onto PC, *Richie Shoemaker* reaches for the reset switch before realising he actually quite likes this one

While it may look a little like *Splinter Cell*, it's not not even close to being in the same league.

INPERSPECTIVE

SPLINTER CELL

Reviewed Issue 125, Score 94%

A great console game done well makes for a great PC game (take heed, Namco). And if you like your covert ops to be a bit more covert, Sam Fisher's the name to look for.

MAX PAYNE 2

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 93%

No multiplayer options here either and the game is over in the blink of an eye, but bullet-time, a gripping storyline and loads of replayability goes a long way.

IF HALO, *Splinter Cell* and *Vice City* have taught us anything, it's that porting a game from console to PC can be a huge success. Even though *Splinter Cell* and *Vice City* were hardly changed from their front-room cousins, they won out because beneath the high-res textures and mouse-friendly controls, they're excellent games.

Halo is the anomaly; it was a PC game originally, but its case proves that unless you take the time to add some PC extras –

especially when developing a shooter – you aren't going to convince anyone. Fortunately, the inclusion of some great online multiplayer options helped its cause no end.

PULLING INTO PORT

Following this rather obvious theory through, *kill.switch* sticks to the tried-and-tested principle furrowed by most console ports. The PC version was only announced last November – when the PS2 and Xbox versions

were readied for release – and it's taken just a few months to transpose the game from TV to PC. Despite the competence of the legendary Bitmaps, in such a short time frame and without the authority to add the necessary PC bunting, the game's fate was sealed from the get-go: on its native platform, *kill.switch* is a



Stop prancing around you show-off.



Speaking of show-offs, you can cut that out too.



Play hide and seek with your enemies. Then shoot them if they find you.



It may be short, but hey, it's only a tenner.



No it's not a periscope, it's a sniper-scope.



Avoiding booby traps is generally pretty easy.

good game, which means it can be no more than this on PC.

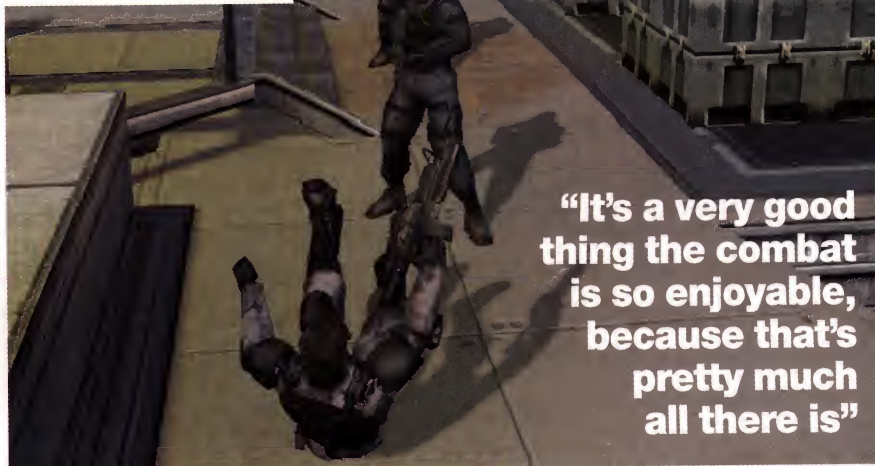
The story running though the missions is predictable, but what makes *kill.switch* worthwhile is a feature termed 'Offensive Cover'. In essence, all this means is that by pressing the 'crouch' key in close proximity to an upright surface, your character will hunker down to offer the smallest possible profile to the enemy. You can still move, slowly, but the best thing is that you can 'blindfire' around corners or pop your head out to let off a more accurate shot.

It works similarly to the crouch/peek feature indigenous to most first-person shooters, but in third-person it works far,

far, far better. The icing on the cake is that you can roll and dive between cover, loose off a hail of lead, nonchalantly lob a flashbang grenade over the top and dive forward to the next collection of boxes.

In response, AI goons dive for crates, run from grenades, go crazy when blinded and pretty much ape your movements. However, they lack your training and rather than survive, their duty is to fall in large numbers – which they do regularly.

These situations are very enjoyable and despite the arcade feel, the combat is quite tactical as you dart for cover, watch for enemy soldiers trying to outflank your position and



And if you ever come near my wife again...

charge ahead to the next objective. It's a very good thing the combat is so enjoyable, because that's pretty much all there is.

MORE PLEASE, LOTS

There are no vehicles to drive, no squads to fight alongside, the locales and the arsenal of weapons are over-familiar, and the game itself is over in a matter of hours. But in spite of all this, *kill.switch* possesses an addictive quality married with a tight, focused design. It keeps you fitfully engaged despite the imposed limitations of the

ARMY OF ONE

COME ON THEN – I'LL TAKE YOU ALL ON!

There's so much potential in *kill.switch*, it's untrue. The ducking and diving action lends itself so perfectly to online combat it beggars belief that Namco didn't consider developing it for PC. The ballistics and properties of the weapons may not be realistic, but the principles of this style of combat certainly are: covering fire, outflanking manoeuvres, staggered break-and-enter advances... In fact it's hard to comprehend why even a basic co-operative mode wasn't attempted, especially in light of the fact that the single-player game is so short.

For the record, it took me six hours to complete the game – so releasing it for a tenner is definitely a good move.



kill.switch is a lonely old business.

"It's a very good thing the combat is so enjoyable, because that's pretty much all there is"

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ The 'Offensive Cover' feature works brilliantly
- ✓ Tense, tactical and engaging arcade combat
- ✓ A well-executed conversion
- ✗ Lack of variety
- ✗ All over in six hours
- ✗ No multiplayer options

74

Enjoyable duck-and-shoot action that's good while it lasts

console for which it was originally commissioned – but it could have been so much more. With a decent selection of multiplayer options it could have countered *Counter-Strike* (geddit?), and with squads of allies it would certainly stack up to *Ghost Recon*.

Were there to be a sequel geared towards the strengths of the PC, we'd welcome it with open arms. For now, what we have is an enjoyable diversion that will keep you occupied for a few fun-filled hours – and at a mere £9.99, that's pretty damn good value in our opinion. **EW**

VICTORIA: AN EMPIRE UNDER THE SUN

■ £29.99 | Pub: Deep Silver | Dev: Paradox Entertainment |
ETA: Out Now | www.paradoxplaza.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 256MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 512MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Daniel Emery wonders if he can review *Victoria* without using the words 'posh', 'falls' or 'secrets'...



An overload of information – in this case, the religions in your empire. But what does it all mean?

VICTORIA IS the follow-up to Paradox's rather splendid WWII turn-based strategy game *Hearts Of Iron*. But while that game had you running a nation through the dark period of 1936-45, *Victoria* has you in the, er, Victorian era, hence the cunning name. So that would make it a pre-dated sequel. Or something.

If you were guilty of sleeping through your history lessons (that means you at the back), Queen Victoria came to power in

1837 and was superglued to her throne until 1901. During that time, Britain went from being a reasonable European power to the largest empire the world has ever seen.

Oh, happy days. Then she died, the entire empire started to collapse and everything went down the pan.

Victoria does its level best to recreate the time, technology and events of that period, and you can play as any one of the 133 different nations that were knocking about. You control your country's military, political shape, technological development and forge the nation's destiny. It all sounds like fun. Only, it isn't.

WTF?

The game has issues; huge, massive issues with bells on. The most obvious is the lack of tutorials. We played *Hearts Of Iron* to death and still found *Victoria* incomprehensible for the first few hours, despite the fact they share the same game engine. What chance does a

new gamer have? Does Paradox think we're clairvoyant and know exactly how the trade/industry/ combat and political modes work? But just in case you are, your efforts are going to be further thwarted by regular crashes to the desktop – a problem not resolved despite various patches.

STOP RIGHT NOW

Victoria also attempts to overdose you with information. Take resources: in *Hearts Of Iron*, it was simple. Oil, steel, coal and rubber were the raw materials you needed and they were enough to make it interesting without being OTT. However, *Victoria* has 12 options ranging from the obvious – wood, steel and coal – through to luxury goods to keep the people happy as well as explosives and small arms to load up the troops. The main problem here is that it's impossible to see at a glance which resources you're short of at any time, which can hamper your building plans no end.

If that wasn't enough to make your head explode, then the



This is about as pretty as it gets.



The First World War gets off to a rather slow start.

combat is the coup de grâce. Attacking a small nation isn't too hard – swarm across the boarder, capture the land and annex for the good of the motherland. However, a large country will spawn partisans (a tad weird, because it wasn't until WWII that partisan and guerrilla warfare really came into its own).

Even stranger is how 3,000 troops can suddenly appear in the middle of a desert when you have the place surrounded. The fighting isn't fun – it feels like trying to shoot mildew with an air pistol. The end result is you spend ages trying to conquer a country that just won't go down – even when you have troops on every inch of their soil.

Having said all that, *Victoria* is compelling – in a masochistic way. Deep down, there's a great game trying to get out, but it's been hamstrung by our many

complaints that can be summed up in one sentence. Piss-poor support for the new user. *Victoria* will infuriate strategy enthusiasts and baffle everyone else. Maybe a few patches might sort it out but until then, think hard before parting with your cash. [F]

INPERSPECTIVE

HEARTS OF IRON

Reviewed Issue 114, Score 85%

Complex (but not overly so) WWII turn-based strategy game, which uses the same engine as *Victoria*. This has been patched to the hilt, so it's even better now than when we initially reviewed it.

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS 2

Reviewed Issue 126, Score 72%

A rather more simple game of European/worldwide conquest during medieval times, this focused more on the combat and historical/political aspects of a game rather than resource management.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Very deep
- ✓ Engrossing gameplay
- ✓ Music by Beethoven
- ✗ Huge learning curve
- ✗ No tutorials
- ✗ Very buggy

52

More dark age
than golden age

EMPIRE STATE BUILDING



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COMBAT MISSION: AFRIKA KORPS

■ US\$35 from www.battlefront.com | Pub: Battlefront | Dev: Battlefront | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Steve O'Hagan does the desert foxtrot



IF YOU appreciate a spot of turn-based action and have a healthy interest in historical accuracy, you really should have played *Combat Mission* in one of its guises over the last three years. It's the single most important development in hardcore strategy gaming that's happened in eons.

This third instalment is less a new game, and more a new setting – North Africa and Italy –



Rushed planning leads to disaster.



OK, it's not winning any awards for graphics.

and uses the same 'we go' system as before. You and another player take as long as you want to issue orders to all your units for your upcoming one-minute turn. The computer then generates the outcome in what is essentially a one-minute-long piece of film, which you can replay as many times and from as many angles as you like. Shells rain down, tanks go up in flames and men panic under incoming machine-gun fire.

CM's total commitment to realism does have an impact on playability, as you have to plan your moves and appreciate the vagaries of such things as battlefield communications and

artillery-spotting techniques. But the pay-off – especially in multiplayer play-by-email (PBeM) games – is a tactical hit the like of which few other titles can match.

A lot of people will find the system too intricate and not immediate enough. But if you're inclined towards a more cerebral thrill, *Combat Mission* still offers the most realistic and arguably the most satisfying World War II strategy fix around.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

75

**For the hardcore,
this is essential**

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2: TIME TWISTER

■ £19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Chris Sawyer | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 300, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card **DESIRES** PII 400, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

Steve Hill steps back in time in search of amusement

**FULL VERSION OF
ROLLERCOASTER
TYCOON 2 REQUIRED**

FOLLOWING the unexceptional *Wacky Worlds*, this is the second *Rollercoaster Tycoon 2* expansion pack to be released in the space of eight months. As such, completists are now looking at an outlay in the region of 70 quid, a princely sum that would comfortably cover a day out in a real theme park (or amusement park, as the box calls it, in an attempt to stress that this is no way a rip-off of Theme Park).

Should you prefer to eschew the horrors of the

general public in favour of the warmth and sanctity of your PC den, what do you get for your 20 notes? The answer is 14 new scenarios, loosely covered by a vague time-travelling theme.

Futures and pasts are both covered, so expect to build such unlikely treats as your own Jurassic Park, a rollercoaster-oriented version of Woodstock, and a terrifying vision of a future world involving space rangers.

The core game hasn't changed one iota from the initial

release, and if you haven't played it for a while it's hard to actually see where the new scenarios have installed themselves, simply slotting in alongside the default ones (and those from *Wacky Worlds*). The Time Twister scenarios are all perfectly adequate, but the point is that there are home-made versions of comparable quality freely available on the Internet. As such, 20 quid for a few pretend dinosaurs doesn't seem particularly great value.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

45

No purchase necessary



Two hours of my life that I'll never get back.



The builder's estimate proved grossly inaccurate.

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THE FIRST CHOICE FOR PC GAMERS

NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL 2

■ £14.99 | Pub: Bigben Interactive | Dev: JoWood | ETA: Out now

REQUIRES PII 233, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card DESIRES PII 400, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

Everybody needs good neighbours. Not Steve Hill

THEY SAID it couldn't be done. They said it shouldn't be done. In reality, no one said anything of the sort, because absolutely nobody cared about the original *Neighbours From Hell*. The only remarkable thing about the game is the fact that it has spawned a sequel, so somebody somewhere must have bought it.

For the overwhelming majority of you that didn't, the premise was based around a fictional reality TV show. You controlled the character of Woody, essentially an ersatz Jeremy Beadle, able to boost his ratings by playing increasingly cruel practical jokes on his fat oaf of a neighbour.

The only difference with this sequel is the fact that it's set on holiday, with Woody stalking the neighbour around such locales as the beach, a cruise ship and India, all scrolling two-screen replicas of each other but with

different props. The point 'n' click interface lets you carry out such hi-jinks as putting a crab in the neighbour's cool-box or smearing chilli sauce on his arse-wipe, with predictably hilarious results. Later levels do get slightly more complicated with the introduction of multiple characters and more complex tricks, but to be honest it's little more than a simple puzzle game and you've seen pretty much all there is to offer within an hour or so.

The presentation is pleasing enough in a Wallace & Gromit style, but ultimately it's end-of-the-pier stuff that will struggle to entertain all but the most wide-eyed non-gamer. This is one reality TV show you'll be glad to walk out on.

PCZONE VERDICT **41**
Hell's bells



That's Olga on the right. In a cunning plot twist, the neighbour fancies her.

ALIEN FLUX

■ £14.95 from www.puppygames.net | Pub: Puppy Games | Dev: Puppy Games | ETA: Out Now

IMAGINE if you will a hybrid of *Asteroids* and *Defender*, plopped into a techno-organic microscopic world of eerie squelches and strobe effects and you'd be close to experiencing what this rather innovative and addictive retro-styled shooter has to offer.

The idea is to protect your Fluffies from invading aliens who want to ensnare them in bubbles. It's not as cute as it sounds though; pop one of your flock and he'll squeak like a gerbil under an articulated truck. Keep at least one Fluffy alive however and the next level beckons, replete with ever more dastardly alien shapes and a smattering of new weapons and power-ups.

While the sound effects are top-notch, the graphics are overly simplistic. The background looks like an unfurled ball of paper while the stock aliens are little more than basic geometric shapes. Despite this, the game has a real sense of urgency about it, with you struggling to control your craft as waves of aliens materialise around you. Best of all the precision controls require some skill at higher levels, making this one of the more demanding arcade shooters you can play, and while it may be a tad on the expensive side for what it is, it's still more than worth a look.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT **70**



The aliens know where you are - you're the one lighting up the map.



Those oily blobs are soooo annoying. And that just looks like an artichoke.



It's like *Pac-Man* with a pinch of *Chuckie Egg* and pre-SNES *Mario*.



Cherries, high score tables, jumpers for goal posts... Marvellous.

SUPERSTAR CHEFS

■ £11.20 from www.arcadelab.com | Pub: Arcade Lab | Dev: Arcade Lab | ETA: Out Now

JAMIE Oliver and Anthony Worrall Thompson now star in their own platform game... Sadly not true, but this game does have chefs, and, most importantly of all, it is rather super.

Ground-breaking it certainly isn't, though. Thoroughly 2D and without a bump-mapped trixel-shaded polygon in sight, *Superstar Chefs* is decidedly retro in flavour. The aim is simply to jump about the screen collecting fruit (we assume, for some sort of trifle), then bounce across the next screen until 60-odd levels have been cleared of produce. Various cartoon baddies shimmy about patrolling ledges, and moving platforms, lifts and jump pads

can be used to reach those tricky parts of the map.

And it tastes lovely. The music is affectingly dainty and endlessly hummable, the graphics are wonderfully animated and full of character and the pixel-perfect gameplay follows in the best traditions of the sadly discarded genre. The two-player mode isn't too shabby, either. It's perhaps a tad easy, but if you're one of those people who turn to Retrozone before the reviews section - and good on ya if you do - you're bound to lap it up.

Richie Shoemaker

PCZONE VERDICT **72**

WARS & WARRIORS: JOAN OF ARC

■ £29.99 | Pub: Videlis | Dev: Enlight | ETA: March 5

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a GeForce 2 3D card or equivalent **DESIRES** P4 1.5 GHz, 512MB RAM and a GeForce 3 3D card or equivalent

Steve O'Hagan becomes a woman in this hack 'n' slash/RTS hybrid



Come on then - I'll take you all on.

TWO BAD games don't make one good one. Which is the crucial maxim the makers of *Joan Of Arc* have failed to heed. What we have is an inept third-person hack and slash number, combined totally unsuccessfully with a dull-as-ditchwater RTS. Harsh words, granted, but you'll thank us for them.

The game centres on the famous witch/saint (depending on whether you are British or French) and her efforts to restore a French king to the throne. Which seems fair enough. Your job as Joan (you can't play as the Brits) starts off with defending the city of Orleans. Using a piss-poor 3D engine, the game imitates the PlayStation's

Dynasty Warriors series closely in pitching you against massed groups of foes, as you feverishly mash the fire button trying to come up with the combos you'll need to fend them all off. Kills gain you experience, and before long you'll be levelling up, improving attributes and learning new combos as you go.

But this 3D action is god-awful. Lumbering masses of enemy pike men surround you, obscuring your view of the game. The combos are simplistic two-button affairs, and you usually end up dying before you can eat that apple in your pack to restore your health.

So, by the time you get to the RTS elements, you're desperate

for them to save matters. But they seem only to serve to tie different bits of the 3D hack 'n' slash together, and they are similarly poorly implemented, as well as being fatally compromised by the fact *Joan Of Arc* is destined for consoles as well as PC. Granted, the opportunity to switch between third-person action and zoomed-out RTS game modes is interesting, but the developer has failed to implement it in a way which is at all deserving of your time and money.

PCZONE VERDICT **32**
Worse than the movie

RAILROAD PIONEER

■ £29.99 | Pub: Bigben | Dev: JoWood | ETA: March 13

REQUIRES PIII 750, 128MB RAM and a 32 MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D Card

Steve O'Hagan builds up a head of steam for this rail-based strategy flop

IMAGINE if you will, we are drawing a Venn diagram. The first bubble we draw is entitled 'PC Gamers'. Next, we draw a much, much smaller bubble inside of the first, which we shall entitle 'PC gamers who enjoy railway management sims'. Next, inside the small bubble which is inside the big bubble, we shall draw another, even smaller bubble, in which we shall

write the words 'PC gamers who enjoy railway management sims who didn't find that the classic *Railroad Tycoon* series sated their hunger for rolling stock administration.'

We think you'll find this final bubble is awfully small. And furthermore, we think you'll find that the tiny minority who inhabit this sub-section have pretty exacting demands. After all, the

aforementioned *Railroad Tycoon* series was elegant and sophisticated, initiated as it was by the great Sid Meier. Which is why this German-developed addition to the genre is doomed to failure.

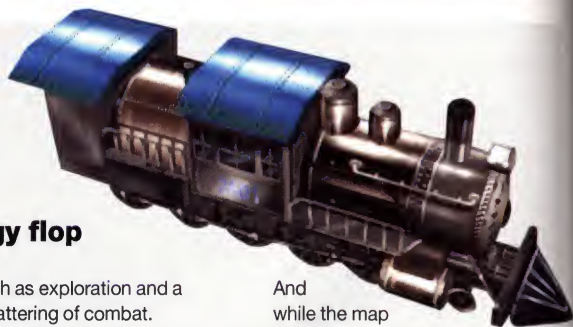
Railroad Pioneer is a trip back to the dawn of the US railroads. It takes the classic 'join up the cities with track' formula, and adds a couple of new aspects

such as exploration and a smattering of combat.

But it all goes wrong from the off. The interface is high on impenetrable. The system of exploration is ludicrous (the whole map is blacked out at the start, so at first you don't even know where the mountains lie). The scenarios are uninspiring. The combat is pointless and passes practically unnoticed.

And while the map visuals are passable, they aren't a patch on the latest version of *Railroad Tycoon*. So we guess what we're saying is - this choo-choo is poo poo.

PCZONE VERDICT **31**
Claptrack



If you want a poor man's *Railroad Tycoon*, buy this.



Letting off steam is something you're unlikely to do in this game.



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REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough

TOTAL WAR: BATTLE COLLECTION

■ £24.99 | Pub: Activision | ETA: Out Now

IF, AFTER all the praise we've lavished on the series you *still* don't own a *Total War* game, there's clearly something seriously wrong with you. With *Shogun: Total War* now available for a measly five notes, and its sequel, *Medieval: Total War* now bundled with the superb *Viking Invasion* expansion pack in this *Battle Collection* for only 25 smackers, there's simply no excuse.

Medieval: Total War is, without doubt, the greatest RTS available. Spanning a 400-year period of European history from 1087-1453, it charges you with leading one of the great empires of the age to world domination. Meanwhile, *Viking Invasion* is based solely in the British Isles, where you must either play as, or repel, invading Vikings.

Medieval is divided into two distinct parts. The first is a turn-based strategy

map, where you handle minimal resource management and diplomacy and move your armies into different provinces. When you bump into an opposing force, the action switches to a stunning 3D map, replete with rolling landscapes, swaying trees, or, if you're battling in the desert, sand dunes.

The battles are breathtaking, featuring literally thousands of troops and are the most tactical and realistic war-gaming experience ever to grace a monitor, as well as being brutal and tense to boot.

At a mere 25 quid for the pair and with months of gameplay to be had, you simply can't afford to deny yourself the pleasure of playing *Medieval: Total War* and *Viking Invasion* any longer.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

91



The battles are staggeringly good.



The first Grand National ended in utter farce.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

■ £12.99 | Pub: VU Games | ETA: Out Now

NOLF was supposed to revolutionise the FPS, adding stealth elements, a female lead and (gasp) humour to the usual mix of mass destruction. Sadly, we thought it was a bit of a dud and despite its legion of fans clamouring for our blood ever since, we've stuck to our guns. Poor AI (hitting a line and running straight at you is not big or clever) and bad execution do not a good shooter make.

So, *NOLF2* then? More of the same? Far from it. Instead, it's the game *NOLF* should have been: brilliant and varied missions, a stealth element that actually works, genuine laugh-out-loud moments, superb set-pieces and lush visuals.

The relentless march of time has left a few footprints on the game and there are some moments in it – chapter four in particular – that still make you lose the will to live.

However, overall you'd be hard pressed to find a better all-round single-player shooter (reflected by the fact that *NOLF2* is still a prominent fixture in our A-List). At £4.99 this would get another 'Classic' award; at £12.99 it's an 'Essential' and way, way better than the recent add-on *Contract J.A.C.K.*

Dave Woods

PCZONE VERDICT

87



For this price, *NOLF2* is a steal.

PROJECT EDEN



Lara's really let herself go...



Father Time has not been kind here.

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: March

'THE NEW game from the makers of *Tomb Raider*. Ah, it gives us a nostalgic glow to remember a time when those words were actually a good thing, rather than a legal disclaimer in a game's smallprint.

Project Eden, Core's 2001 squad-based action/adventure may have signalled the beginning of the end for the UK developer. It's got plenty of good ideas, including driveable scout rovers and real-time morphing enemies, but the game never lived up to its not entirely absent potential.

The idea, cribbed from games such as *Hired Guns*, is to take charge of four characters in a futuristic police squad, switching between them at will and using their various abilities

(hacker/engineer/commander/robot) to solve puzzles and kill things. Each level takes you deeper into the dark realms that lie beneath the game's futuristic city, encountering more nightmarish surprises as you go.

The problem is, the game has about as much character as an Amish stockbroker, with rudimentary AI, weak combat and a clunky interface that forces you to remind your team-mates to follow you every five seconds. The puzzles are still decent and the four-way co-operative mode is worth a look, but we'd only recommend this if your PC is rubbish and you're genuinely hard up.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT

69



Let me show you where you can shove your Hand Of Nod.

COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: March

WE WAITED and we waited and we waited. One of the most high profile cases of slippage in recent years, by the time *Tiberian Sun* finally came out, *Command & Conquer* fans had been whipped into a frenzy. The ground-breaking original plus the *Red Alert* follow-up had set the bar so high that it could ultimately only disappoint. Indeed, expectations were so rampant that when people realised that it was simply another C&C game, there was almost rioting in the streets. What did they expect? That's what Westwood does (or at least, did).

The futuristic scenario may have irked the purists, but *Tiberian Sun* is simply C&C in different trousers: no more, no

less. As such, it is of course excellent, even now capable of sucking the hours away. Along with skirmish mode, two separate campaigns are available (NOD and GDI) and the interim FMV is quaintly watchable too.

Perhaps most surprising is that EA is still supporting the game online, with even a bespoke UK server. As such, there's always a multiplayer game available, something that can only increase with it now going for a fiver. A classic in its day, it's still great now. I knew I was right the first time.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

70

COMBAT MISSION

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

WITH THE third instalment of *Combat Mission* just out (see *Afrika Korps* review on page 88), the timing's perfect for Xplosiv to reissue the original game for just a fiver. And if you're new to the series, we recommend this, the first game, which is high on identical to the latest one.

Using what was a fairly revolutionary turn-based and real-time game system (you take turns to issue orders to your units and then watch them being carried out in real-time), *Combat Mission* seriously set PC war-gamers astir on its release in 2000.



Issue orders. Watch the results.

Its once impressive 3D engine looks ropey by today's standards and the game requires some serious devotion to master. But that doesn't stop this from being the most realistic tactical WWII strategy game that's ever been produced.

From the way orders take time to filter down from your HQ to individual squads, to the way troops panic, rout and desert when put in untenable situations, this is WWII. Witness the armour penetrations of all the weapons in the game and the exhaustive roster of real-life tanks, half-tracks and armoured cars. There's been nothing since the much-missed *Close Combat* series that can hold a candle to *Combat Mission*'s grasp on WWII reality.

Granted, it's too involved and too time-consuming for most gamers. But that's the great thing about releases at this price – other than a measly fiver, what have you got to lose by giving it a go?

Steve O' Hagan

PCZONE VERDICT

85

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

COSSACKS may seem like one of those games played by people who collect those 'Warfare Through The Ages – With Free Binder!' magazines, but there's a lot to enjoy about this historical-based RTS. For a start, it's a true epic, set between the 16th and 18th centuries and focused on thousands of troops engaging in mass slaughter across 3D terrains.

Unlike *Shogun: Total War*, these troops, which feature units like French Chasseur infantry and of course the Ukrainian Cossacks, can be moved individually as well as in large formations, adding an extra strategic element to proceedings. Also, unlike *Shogun*, *Cossacks* combines quite a bit of resource management, so you can create thriving cities full of peasants and gently ripening cornfields.

With two expansion packs of its own, plus a spin-off game, *American Conquest*



Line 'em up and knock 'em down!

(which also has its own expansion), the *Cossacks* formula has certainly been well used and the engine now looks rather dated alongside fully 3D RTS games.

But if you're a hardcore strategy fan and a virgin to *Cossacks*, it's well worth investing five shiny coins for this.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

78

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE, SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

Coo, lots and lots of yummy leftovers for you to chew on this month in the leftover tray. It's the stuff tramps' dreams are made of, the Buckingham Palace waste bin of leftover sections.

First up, there's *Project Nomads* (£4.99, Xplosiv, Out Now). This is an excellent action/strategy game, a genre which produces some incredible games, but rarely tends to do well when it comes to shifting copies. Playing as one of three characters, you command your forces while blasting anything that isn't on your side with an array of impressive weaponry. Buy it. 85 per cent.

Divine Divinity (£9.99, Xplosiv, Out Now) is a bit like *Diablo II*, only more in-depth, more compelling and with dozens more hours of gameplay. With its fully interactive world and ocean-deep storyline, it may look pretty dated, but it's still well worth checking out. 79 per cent.

Lord Of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring (VU Games, £12.99, Out Now) has already taken up more than enough space with its title for a game as bad as this. Suffice to say, it's a very poor action/adventure that totally insults the amazing licence it carries and should be avoided like a pack of orcs on heat. 47 per cent.

Meanwhile, *Sudden Strike Gold* (Sold Out, £9.99, Out Now) is well worth a look if you love WWII and hate resource management, although it's looking incredibly dated now. 74 per cent. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2001* (Xplosiv, £4.99, Out March) is not only over three years old, but a shadow of the excellent *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* which we reviewed back in issue 135. Even at this price, it's really not worth it. 54 per cent.

Finally, we've got *Conflict: Desert Storm* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now) that we reviewed back in issue 137 when it was available for a tenner. A basic tactical shooter, it's now a bargain £5, so we'll up its score from 55 per cent to 59 per cent. We're nice like that.

Martin Korda



Project Nomads.



Sudden Strike Gold.



LOTR: The Fellowship Of The Ring.

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Features

- 5 playable nations.
- It is the first game based on the events of WW 1.
- Realistic visual effects (explosions, debris, fire and many others), impressive 3D landscapes and 3D sound make the player feel they're at the battlefield.
- Massive combats (up to 10,000 units can take part in a battle from each side, & more than 80,000 units on a single map!)
- Non-linear mission structure and authentic historical battles.
- Multiplayer mode (up to 8 players).
- Various units of that period weaponry, armor, vehicles, buildings, which are different for each nation.

"Entente may well be the 'sleeper' hit of the year." - Wargamer.com

"Shooting down an enemy biplane and seeing it plow through your armies marching across the field below is mighty satisfying." - IGN

90% - Gold Award
GamersHall



February 2004

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FEEDBACK



Will Porter, defender of liberty and the free world, recognises the value of democracy and free speech. So please bear witness to his court of gaming justice...

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than **100 words**. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

CALL OF DUTY

REVIEWED ISSUE 136
(BY STEVE O'HAGAN),
SCORE: 94%

What we thought

A shooter that not only entertains, but pays homage to the tens of thousands who lost their lives in the conflict with true respect.

What you said

I'd like to thank the developers of *Call Of Duty* – not for creating one of the best games ever made, but for making me understand the true horror of World War II. I was playing a mission as an American when it struck me: the fear of being hit. Hiding in the trenches as low as I could go, hearing bullets fly by my head and the screams of both German and American soldiers made me appreciate the absolute nightmare these guys went through. No history book could ever put me as close to the experience as I felt then.

People who say first-person shooters are just mindless point-and-shoot affairs are totally wrong. *CoD* has made me appreciate the horrors of WWII, and the bravery of the soldiers who fought for us. I believe all developers should look to *Call*



"You wouldn't like me when I'm angry," said Dr Incy Wincy.

Of Duty as the blueprint, as this is how games should be made.

James H

I agree that *Call Of Duty* is an awesome game, but don't you think it's let down by some of its slower solo missions? Stuff like the raid on the big castle and the mission inside the dam clearly didn't get half as much time or effort put into them – they're just straightforward corridor-shooting affairs and don't compare to the fear and exhilaration you get in the actual battle scenes.

Simon O'Connor

Steve's comment:

OK, so some of the missions aren't as mind-blowing as the others, but if the whole game was crazed, gun-chewing bombardment without any slower sections or stealth, it could have been a fairly unbalanced affair. *Call Of Duty* remains the greatest shooter of 2003, showing you the brutality of war while still providing an unforgettable gaming experience to boot.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

REVIEWED ISSUE 137
(BY RICHIE SHOEMAKER),
SCORE: 94%

What we thought

The closest to being a Jedi you can get without becoming an actor and moving to LA.

What you said

I haven't had a good night's sleep in the two weeks since I bought *KOTOR* – I just can't turn it off. There are hardly any decent RPGs coming out these days and I can only hope that

publishers start churning out more role-players of this quality.

Dom Napleton

KOTOR stole my life away. Before this, I can't recall a game that made me completely immune to all signs of time passing, but *KOTOR* had me playing for five hours in one sitting! Although I mainly play first-person shooters, there's no genre as gripping as a good

multiple locations, the choice of good or evil, a plethora of sub-missions, superb sound, 40-plus hours of gameplay and what do you have? Pure genius.

Matt Richards

Richie's comment:

I'm yet to come across anyone who had a problem with *KOTOR*. It's reinvigorated my love of *Star Wars* (the franchise, if not the films) and has simultaneously proved there's still a heart beating within the RPG genre.

SPELLFORCE: ORDER OF DAWN

REVIEWED ISSUE 137
(BY RICHIE SHOEMAKER),
SCORE: 79%

What we thought

It's unlikely to offer much of a challenge for the most tactically astute RTS minds, but it's unique, attractive and engaging enough to appeal to all but the most unforgiving fantasy fan.

What you said

I like *Spellforce* because it does something different. I've played *Warcraft* to death and had more hack 'n' slash RPGs than I've had hot dinners, so it was really quite refreshing to play a new

spin on the genre. It's got its faults, but I'm more than happy that I've got my money's worth.

Rich Hardy

I've been playing *Spellforce* for a couple of weeks now and I still get the impression I've barely started on it. It's incredibly addictive with fantastic graphics and is now my favourite RTS (not to mention RPG). As well as being epic, vast and beautiful, there are hundreds of little details in it. For instance, wolves sitting down and scratching their ears from time to time; trees swaying in the breeze; fish leaping out of water and real day and night cycles, with the sun and moon moving across the sky. In a word: beautiful.

The gameplay is amazing too, with RPG maps, RTS maps and mixture-of-both maps. It all works well and gives a great new way of doing things. The game was judged way too harshly and should be near the top of the A-list. It beats *Morrowind* hands down – it's actually exciting.

Mr_Flibble13

Richie's comment:

Spellforce is a great hybrid game, but its individual components do have a fair few flaws. The RPG stuff is fine – bar the lame story – but the enemy AI isn't great and I found myself winning most of the battles in 'en masse' scrambles rather than with calculated manoeuvres. **PCZ**

"I haven't had a good night's sleep since I bought KOTOR"

DOM NAPLETON IS A FAN OF INSOMNIA – AND KOTOR

RPG. The act of moulding your character to your taste immerses you in a way no simple storyline can by itself. Unite this with the *Star Wars* universe, exquisite graphics and a fantastic storyline (with a great twist); then throw in



Call Of Duty: the greatest shooter of 2003.

REALITY CHECK: DARTS

In the last in the current series of Reality Checks before we welcome back the Supertest, **Steve Hill** takes on **Eric Bristow** at the Sport of Gods. Your commentator: **Sid Waddell**. Magic darts!

IN THE high stakes arena of competitive sport, it doesn't get much better than darts. A gripping blend of science, mathematics and artistry, it requires supreme levels of concentration (and alcohol) to succeed. One player bestrides the world of darts like a colossus: Eric Bristow, MBE. Despite protégé Phil 'The Power' Taylor's decade of dominance, for many, Bristow is still the greatest of them all. He is the man who did more than any other to bring darts to the masses (Jim Bowen notwithstanding).

The soundtrack to the drama of darts has always been provided by the legendary Sid Waddell, a commentator beyond compare. No-one has ever made a sport their own to the extent of the Geordie genius, who once said of be-permed pro, Steve 'The Adonis' Beaton: "He's not A-donis – he's THE donis!"

Waddell's association with the mighty sport goes back to the nascent days of

televised tournaments. To this day, his epic commentary of the 1983 World Championship final still resonates, with the feral cry of "Deller! For the title!"

"I shrewdly opt for the John Lowe Club Special flights, hoping to unnerve Bristow. He appears nonplussed"

marking the moment when 100-1 farmhand Keith Deller famously vanquished the mighty Bristow.

LET'S! PLAY! DARTS!

A similar challenge awaits Eric tonight, as he has an appointment with another plucky challenger at the Mecca of darts. The upholstered sewer that is the Circus Tavern in Purfleet, Essex is reassuringly, resplendently, rank, a heaving morass of cheap smoke, sovereign rings and spilt

beer. Magnificent. Suitably unpretentious cuisine is available, and my tepid chicken balti pie could provide a comfortable home for a large family of streptococci.

The PDC World Championship is under way, and I pensively watch a few games in preparation for my big match. Waddell cheerily waves from the commentary box, where earlier in the day he became so animated that he spat out a tooth, the rogue dentistry thankfully ensconced in his pocket by the time our game comes round.

Up close, Bristow is a fearsome opponent, and he edgily prowls the oche. Unperturbed, I meticulously prepare my



darts – £24.99 from Argos eight years ago (including board) – the jangling nerves eased only by five pints of cooking lager. In a cunning piece of psychological warfare on my part, I shrewdly opt for the John Lowe Club Special flights, hoping to unnerve Bristow by playing in the colours of his archrival. He appears nonplussed,

WHAT'S A REALITY CHECK?

Reality Check is a monthly feature comparing PC games to their real-life equivalents. Or at least, as close as we can get without risking serious bodily harm.





The Crafty Cockney: his aim is true. On occasion.

and is more intent on tracking down a set of arrows himself.

With both competitors happy and ready to play, it's over to Sid: "Right we are, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Circus Tavern, Purfleet, and at no expense we have brought you a special challenge match between Steve 'King Of The' Hill against the one and only Eric Bristow, five times World Champion, the great Crafty Cockney. Hill in a shirt like an explosion in a paint factory... He starts off with a 60! Well dang my bones!"

It's a mere sensation, my first arrow sailing into the treble 20 with what can only be described as aplomb, sending Waddell into delirium (his preferred state). Unfortunately, the next two darts lodge themselves in the single one, bringing the hysterical Waddell back down to earth: "Oh, but he only follows it with two..."

NOT LIKE THE OLD DAYS

Eric is now at the oche, Sid at the mic: "Brissy, poised like a Praying Mantis, a bit high, tries to pull it, gets a fluke treble 12 and just misses the 60! So here's Steve, the last man in Fleet Street to use a quill pen. I won't tell you what he was using it for but he's in good nick."

And so on. Despite having apparently recovered from his lengthy bout of darditis - whereby he could scarcely throw an arrow - Bristow is a long way from his A-game, and begins to mutter about "borrowed darts". My measured approach also irks him, and he urges: "Come on Steve, we got a game on here, mate."

As we trade scores of 43 and 30, Waddell maintains order: "Steve, gotta concentrate, on the oche, poised, in the Gucci loafers, and of course the Oxfam jeans. Bristow clad in the more straight gear, Prada shoes, Gucci shirt, MICHAELANGELO STYLE FLINGING!" Misinterpreting

my increasingly erratic aim, Waddell screams: "Steve 'over the' Hill 'under the' Hill starts throwing exhibition shots! Three doubles! Unlucky, tried to follow double 12, double five with a bull! The man's got no respect for the man who put the 'unt' into Tungsten - at least I think that's what I tried to say. Here he is, poised, back leg out of sync with the front leg, no coordination, angle of dangle of the right arm not exactly what it should be..."

HISSING SID

As Sid's analysis suggests, I'm not scoring particularly heavily. "Steve," he announces. "You require a hedgehog, with bristles."

"Extra bristles," adds Bristow.

"Seven scored," notes Waddell.

Demonstrating an extensive knowledge of arcane currency, Sid muses: "Bristow, a face like a figure on an Etruscan coin. Steve, with a face like a wooden nickel covered in cobwebs. All the charisma of gangrene."

A dismal 29 prompts Bristow to ask: "How long have you been practising for this game?"

"Five minutes."

"What a waste of time."

With a finish in sight, Bristow begins showboating, but mathematically I'm still in it. As Sid says: "Steve, you need several. Has to get a big treble, like treble 121."

I do finally manage a second treble 20, prompting Sid to gush: "Oh lovely, lovely, lovely, saving the best til last there. Steve, the man of whom Bobby George said 'Who?'"

With Bristow stuck in the madhouse of double one - "We could be here all friggin' night" - I have a real chance of an 84 finish. Hitting single 20, Bristow advises "14, Bull," but I pull the second dart and the Crafty Cockney finishes at his next visit: "Game, set and the match."

As he resumes his position at the bar after the match, I ask Bristow how I can improve my game.

"Get yourself some new darts." 

REALITY CHECK: DARTS



Nice shirt, Steve.

HOW REAL IS... JIMMY WHITE'S CUEBALL WORLD



It's snooker! It's darts! Brilliant!

GO ON JIMMY!

It may be a pool game, but the darts mini-game is one of the best a man can buy - even if it does involve throwing with a mouse.

SCORE



HOW REAL IS... WINMAU WORLD DARTS



A sensational start from Hill leaves Bristow reeling.

WIN MORE, LOSE LESS?

Considering it requires using a real dartboard and darts, it's pretty damn real - providing you can get Bristow round your house.

SCORE



YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

ANARCHY IN THE PCZ



■ ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ As the winter nights slowly turn into spring days, and the cold, grey rain gives way to slightly less cold, grey rain with hints of sun moving in from the south, a man's thoughts turn to one thing. Giving the system a right old kicking.

Maybe it's the revolutionary spirit bursting to life as the years advance. Maybe it's that old trooper Johnny Rotten (at the time of writing) turning the jungle air blue and viewers' ears red. Maybe it's just boredom. Whatever the cause, my gills are tingling like a trout in mating season.

A mission. Nothing grand, nothing life-changing. Just a little activity to sow the seeds of sedition into the rapidly maturing world of massively multiplayer. If you play such a beastie, you now have an additional ongoing task to the usual level grinding, resource harvesting and community building. What fun!

As of today, I'm instigating the PC ZONE 'Inner Circle'. You may already be in a MMOG guild, you may have friends the virtual world over, you may be respected, revered or reviled. But now you can add 'dangerous subversive' to the strings on your bow.

I wish to see secret societies forming in every MMOG. I wish a presence in every virtual gamescape. You are to be my eyes and my ears. Along the way, you may encounter other members of the IC, whom you shall identify with the secret password – 'Red Mandarin'. Join with them. Plot your schemes. Scheme your plans. Plan your plots. Then email me at online.zone@pczone.co.uk to tell me of your progress. You shall then receive your membership numbers and instructions. I demand nothing less than total dominance. Fly my pretties, fly...

Jesters Calm The Savage Beasts

RTS/SHOOTER COMBO GETS MASSIVE OVERHAUL AND EUROPEAN PUSH



Yes, he just picked up a tree. Run!

GOOD combinations are always tricky to pull off. *Alien vs. Predator*. Cheese and onion. Morecambe & Wise. Reviewed in issue 138, *Savage: The Battle For Newerth* pulled off the tricky task of combining all-action first-person shooters with deeply involving strategy games – and did it with aplomb.

Not one to rest on its laurels, developer S2 Games has recently unleashed not so much a patch as a complete overhaul of the game, just in time for the official European launch (see competition, right). Aside from fixing a host of bugs, the big news with the update is that there are now all-new healer units to employ, new structures to build and a complete upgrade of the in-game graphics engine.

The European pack (which should be on your shelves now) is something of a collector's edition of the game, containing a detailed 64-page strategy guide, exclusive European-only maps, the complete *Samurai Wars* total conversion and a DVD-style bonus disc of extras created by the US modding community.

"S2 Games has recently unleashed not so much a patch as a complete overhaul"



Graphical updates across the board.

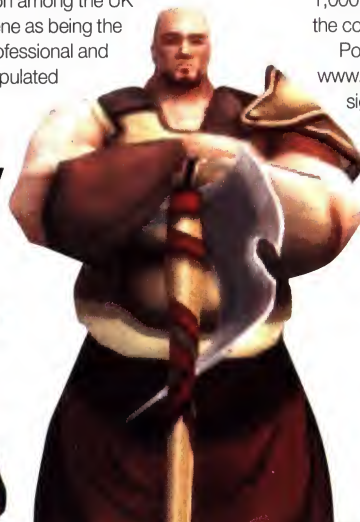


There simply isn't enough silly string in gaming.

Savage is also being lined up as one of the star attractions at the imminent i19 LAN event being held by Multiplay from March 12-15. The 'i' series has garnered a reputation among the UK LAN scene as being the most professional and most populated

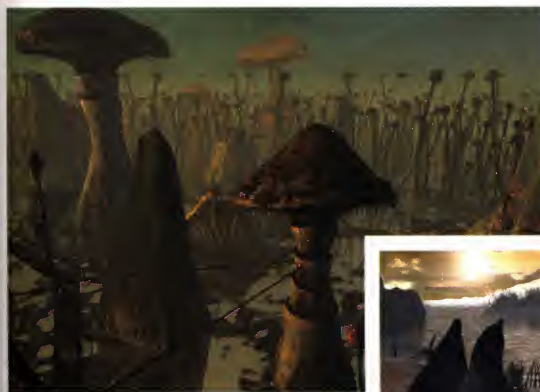
multiplayer gaming event. *Savage* publishers Digital Jesters will be hosting a prize tournament at the event, with a top purse of £1,000 up for grabs. With over 1,000 people set to attend the jamboree, the competition is set to be fierce.

Point your browsers at www.multiplay.co.uk for more details on signing up for the event. For more info on *Savage*, head over to www.savageeurope.com.



**100****BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM**
We get hands-on in the jungle**106****EA SPORTS ONLINE**
It's in the game**110****NFS: UNDERGROUND**
The fast and furious racer online**113****NEVERQUEST**
Steve Hill tries to ride the dragon

URU LIVE - DEAD

CYAN WORLDS SHUTS THE DOORS ON AMBITIOUS ONLINE ADVENTURE**Not enough growth to support Uru Live.**

IT COULD have been the next big thing in adventure gaming, but instead it's another casualty on the roadside of online visions. *Uru Live*, the elaborate multiplayer aspect to the latest *Myst* outing, failed to get started and has now been canned for good.

Cyan Worlds announced the news in an open letter on its website, citing a lack of subscribers as the reason for the closure.

Cyan CEO Rand Miller stated: "Even with all of the time, money, resources, people, code, sweat and heart poured into *Uru Live*,

**The sun sets on another brave idea.**

we needed a certain number of subscribers to pay the bills. We didn't get there."

Uru itself is set to live on, with the planned online content now due to appear as a series of expansion packs for the offline traveller. The first is due to appear within a couple of months and will be available to *Uru* players for free.

**From now on, you're on your own.**

Part of *Uru Live*'s problem stems from the unstable nature of its beta test. Nonetheless, a sizeable Internet community had sprung up among the 'beta testers', telling tales of exploration and organising in-game guilds.

The full text of Cyan Worlds' statement can be found at www.cyanworlds.com

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



GAMEACCOUNT GOLF
(WWW.GAMEACCOUNT.COM)

Mark Twain once described golf as being 'a good walk spoiled'. Of course, he never had the fortune to play a round with Bruce, Tarbie and Gary Player in a pro-celebrity special during the late '70s. Eighteen holes



of chin comedy and Scouser cheekiness and he's more likely to have said something along the lines of "nice to putt you, to putt you nice", to much good-natured chuckling from the Middle England crowds.

Yes, golf is brilliant, and this month's webgame choice recreates the game's competitive nature through the medium of small-scale gambling. OK, we're not talking *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* in terms of presentation, graphics and

**Drive for show, putt for dough.**

gameplay. But what we are talking is an enthusiastic online community, regular prize tournaments and bags of charm. The GameAccount site itself is full of, as *Banzai* would say, new gambling opportunities – but other than some basic parlour game affairs and something odd in a jungle, golf is where the action's at.

Unlike *FXGolf* (see issue 136), *GA Golf* doesn't require a monthly fee and doesn't attempt to reach beyond its limited scope. You put in exactly how much money you want to risk for a game – no more, no less.

Consequently, the prizes aren't as grand as some gambling sites, but that only adds to the appeal. You're not competing with hardened virtual golfing professionals for high-pressure stakes. Just a couple of quid with other office workers on their lunch breaks. You might make enough for a couple of pints at the end of the day and, be honest, wouldn't the world be great if all games had such flavoursome rewards?



COMPETITION

WIN SAVAGE!

JOIN THE BATTLE FOR NEWERTH!
TEN COPIES UP FOR GRABS

To help celebrate *Savage*'s European release, we've teamed with Digital Jesters to offer ten copies of the swanky European Retail Pack, complete with strategy guide, maps, exclusive *Samurai Wars* mod, bonus disc of extra files and vouchers for free clan server rental.

To win one of the ten retail packs, all you have to do is answer the following question:

Which 'Savage' is famous for having ridiculous hair, wearing silly clothes and hosting *Blankety Blank*?

- A: Robbie Savage
B: Lily Savage
C: Fred Savage

Send your answer before Thursday April 1 on the back of a postcard or envelope to: Savage Competition, PC Zone, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.

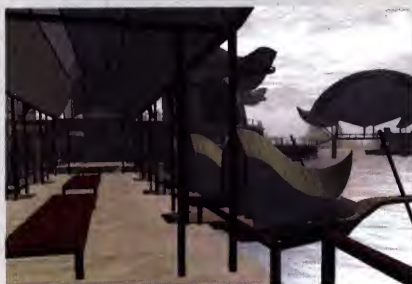


DEVELOPER DIARY



DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters



All aboard for monster island.

Two weeks ago we announced a delay to the release of *Dragon Empires*, with very firm plans to release in autumn. While this is disappointing news, I want to remind everyone that game development is a tricky business. In this diary, I'll explain a little about how the delay came about.

When *Dragon Empires* was first conceived, it was planned to be an update to an old online game called *The Realm*. After a while we decided to do a sequel to *The Realm*, but then that idea was dropped and a whole new concept for the game evolved, known as *Dragon Empires*. This means that pinning down the dates for the game's release has been very tricky, as our tasks have been constantly changing!

"Pinning down a date for *Dragon Empires* has been tricky as our tasks have been constantly changing"

But the good news for us is that we recently completed a lot of planning, and the various tasks we need to complete to finish the game have been worked out and the new date fixed. This is also good news for gamers because rather than compromise the quality of the game to get it out on time, we're happy to move the date to allow us to do the game justice.

In other news, we announced this month that the next phase of our beta was about to start. Initially, we'll be inviting 3,200 people to join and adding to that number in March as the phases continue to progress. The development of the game is getting quite exciting now as we see quests, monsters and various other features appearing every day. Sharing this with other people is always enjoyable.

The best thing I've seen this week has been what we call 'monster island', where our animators are testing all of the creatures and their animations. With a simple command they test their death animations, lead them by the nose around the place and with a touch of a button create hundreds more to be manipulated.

We'll keep adding testers and expect to have a all of our beta list members playing in a big beta test in a few months. Sign up on the web page (www.dragonempires.com) to join in the fun!

Till next time...

BEYOND NEOCRON

FUTUREWORLD GETS MAKEOVER, APARTMENTS, BETTER SEX



The new engine provides a facelift for the whole game. The player housing will offer a variety of styles.



WHEN IT COMES to dark, dingy and disturbing, no MMOG does it like *Neocron*. Although it never quite managed to reach the giddy heights of *EverQuest* popularity, the year-3000 cyberworld has steadily built a loyal and appreciative audience since its 2002 launch. And now, the patience of the faithful is being rewarded with the game's first expansion pack.

Neocron: Beyond Dome Of York introduces a whole new city to the

game, complete with new dungeons and mission areas, as well as a complete overhaul for the in-game graphics engine. This includes updating all the existing locations and, amusingly, replacing the game's strippers with better-looking models.

Customisable player apartments are also added to the mix, with a host of furniture and styles to choose from. The tutorial is being completely redesigned to make life less confusing

for newbies, and a brand new cyberspace environment is being built to provide hackers with a more rewarding game experience.

Beyond Dome Of York is set for a summer 2004 release. We'll revisit the dystopian world as it gets nearer.

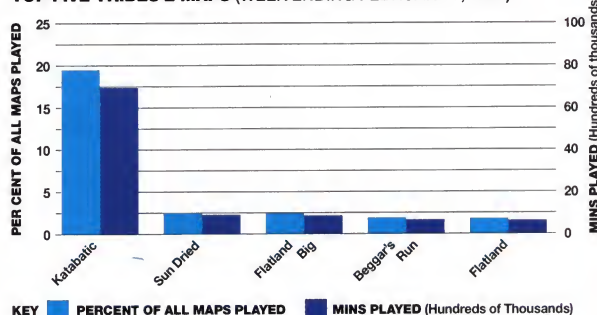
- Publisher: CDV
- Developer: Reaktor.com
- ETA: Summer 2004
- Website: www.neocron.com

STATZONE

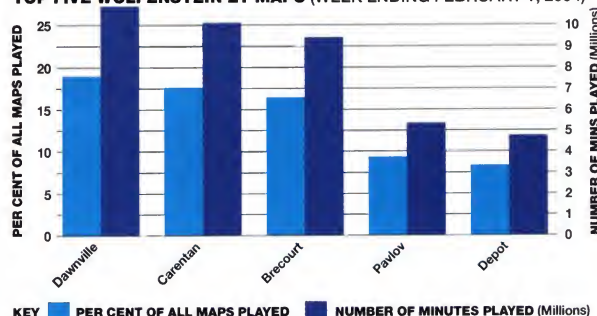
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: **ESPORTS.net**

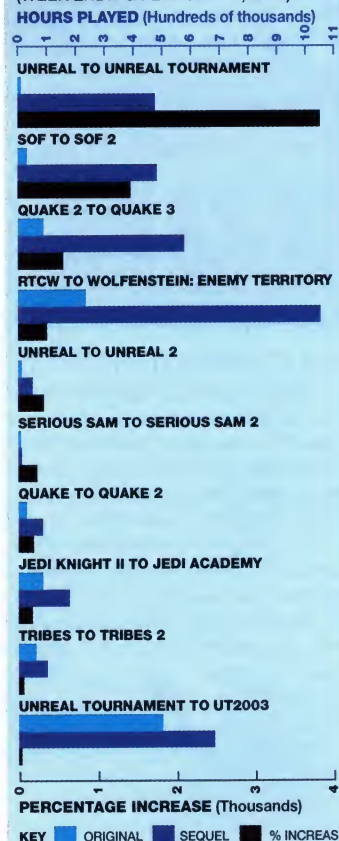
TOP FIVE TRIBES 2 MAPS (WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 1, 2004)



TOP FIVE WOLFENSTEIN ET MAPS (WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 1, 2004)



PERCENTAGE INCREASE OF PLAYER HOURS FROM ORIGINAL TO SEQUEL (WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 1, 2004)



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

JACK EMMERT, City Of Heroes

"IN PARAGON City, there's a definite satisfaction from fighting crime on the street. It gets you immediately immersed into the universe," enthuses Jack Emmert, lead designer for superhero MMOG, *City Of Heroes*, when queried about the nature of the game's titular town. "There's also tremendous diversity. Some city zones are pristine and hazard zones may involve earthquake-ridden areas. It feels big, like a real living city."

Indeed it does. There's a majesty and lurking sense of fear that should make any metro citizen feel a rush of recognition. "Being set in the modern era gives it a feel that's unlike anything else out there. Instead of rolling hills you have towering skyscrapers – and your hero is leaping from rooftop to rooftop, foiling muggings in back alleys."

All that concrete should be a welcome departure from the more traditional thatched huts and rat killing of standard fantasy MMOGs. "It really is an extremely distinctive experience," says

Emmert, "and totally different from what you'd find in a fantasy setting. You can act like yourself and still be role-playing, without wondering if you should be typing 'thee' and 'thou'."

Impressive name aside, Paragon City isn't always the most hospitable burg. "Alien creatures known as the Rikti have invaded the planet and Paragon City is being rebuilt," informs Emmert. "The entire sewer area is basically a Rikti nest, totally infested." Heroes, don your waders. "At the centre of the sewer is a creature that appears to be created by the

Rikti, and occasionally heroes have to battle this giant monster," he tells us, with perhaps a touch too much enthusiasm.

"Certain tasks are required of heroes in the city. One is whacking down this sewer monster to stop it growing. These will require teamwork – they're for your *JLA* or *Avengers*-style teams to tackle."

But creating a living Frankenstein monster of a city isn't without challenges. "The most difficult demand has been having to balance the needs for design and story against the rule of fun, exciting gameplay," explains Emmert, who on his own time is happy to dive into supremely technical RPGs. "I'd love to create intricate plots and hints, but sometimes that's not applicable and players don't care for that. So we don't hint at revelation – we just give it away."

That's not to say that everything's on the buffet table right away, however. "A player coming to understand the dynamics of the city should have the feeling of learning about a full comic book universe. That's the whole intent." **PCZ**

"Your hero is leaping from rooftop to rooftop, foiling muggings in back alleys"

JACK EMMERT CITY OF HEROES

■ **Publisher:** NCSoft
 ■ **Developer:** Cryptic Studios
 ■ **ETA:** April 2004
 ■ **Website:** www.cityofheroes.com



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Illusions Canada
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
WEBSITE www.eagames.com/official/battlefield/
ETA March 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the next big step for the *Battlefield* series
- Rumbles in jungles, rivers, ruins and towns
- Incredible contemporary soundtrack
- Fantastic new vehicles and weapons
- Big choppers

CV



DIGITAL ILLUSIONS

Digital Illusions Canada, the outfit entrusted with *Battlefield Vietnam*, stems from its similarly monikered Swedish founders. Originally pinball game designers, then racing game programmers, the company has now managed to revolutionise the way we murder each other online.

1989 Founders of Digital Illusions start working on a game called *Pinball Dreams* while they're still at school.

1992 *Pinball Dreams* is released on Amiga, its success triggering the team to produce a series of games like *Pinball Fantasies* and *Pinball Illusions* over the next few years.

1998 *Motorhead* is released, a loud crazy racing game that paves the way for more vehicular goodness like *Rallymasters* and *Rallispport Challenge*.

2002 *Battlefield 1942* is released, to the sound of much rejoicing.

2003 *Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII* expansion pack is unleashed and adds to BF's already formidable reputation for vehicular wartime carnage.

"Couldn't find any toilet paper. This'll have to do."

Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide

BATTLEFIELD

VIETNAM

HANDS-ON

Being raised on a farm, Will Porter has enjoyed many smells in the morning. Napalm's a first, though...

WAR. HUH! What is it good for? Many would have it that it's good for absolutely nothing. Edwin Starr and a variety of other songsmiths, blaring their lungs over the *Battlefield Vietnam* loading screens are certainly in that camp. When you've just lost control of a US chopper, however, and are travelling downwards at terrifying speeds towards the rice paddy where you've just dropped off your fellow marines while you leap from your fractured, exploding helicopter and watch it pirouette into the Vietcong forces... Well, then at least you can admit that war is extremely good for computer games. Some might say it's exceptional.

ROLL CALL

Just to quell any doubts, *Battlefield Vietnam* is still the game you know and love from *BF1942* at heart. A few nips and tucks to the modes, a plethora of new features and far more complexity to the lush environments, but the old *Battlefield*

vibe still hangs heavy in the air. As soon as we booted up the preview code and gazed lovingly at the machines of death that surrounded us, we felt very much at home, thank you.

Among the toys you're given to play with are the usual heady mix of jeeps, tanks and planes, now complemented by some ingenious new (for the '60s) vehicles that boost the potential for online chaos no end. Airlifting is the name of the game here: M60-laden Hueys ferry soldiers to and from battle hot-spots, Chinook choppers deliver tanks and jeeps to newly

Incidentally, those NVA aren't quite the hole-dwelling guerrillas Hollywood would have you imagine either. They've got MiGs, assault helicopters, towable M46 artillery cannons and a platoon of non-armoured, gun-free scooters. Bizarre.

BACK TO LIFE

A fair amount of thought has clearly been given to the politics of spawn-points. As per usual, your presence in and around the capture points on the map will result in your flag being raised and spawning a-go-go. Only this time round, you'll see exactly

"The first time I was fragged by a Bouncing Betty mine was magical – I can barely wait to try it on BFV virgins"

captured bases, while the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) amphibious troop transports scuttle around the banks and rivers fending off Yankee oppressors.

how long it'll take to capture. The more team-mates you have around you, the faster the process will be. Vietnamese engineers will also have the ability to dig



"Oh, counter-clockwise! Sorry!"



Less wobbly than some bridges we could mention.

out bolt-holes that'll act as camouflaged spawning sites, while the US have boats that can be moved around the more watery levels for better spawn locations.

You'll be able to choose between assault soldiers, engineers, heavy artillery and sniping scouts, each with their own range of weapons. On Charlie's side there's the ubiquitous AK47, flare guns, shotguns and SA-7 heat-seeking missiles. The US hardware, meanwhile, is a lot shinier and more technological than the grimy Chinese and Soviet weaponry of the NVA (what with the napalm, M60s and XM148 machine gun/grenade-launcher combos). While that would be good for documentaries and the like, fortunately our thorough play-testing showed everything to be well balanced and in good fighting order from a gaming point of

view. There shouldn't be many whitewash-style, blitzkrieg victories in this simulated conflict – just as there wasn't one when the US stormed in for a quick and easy dust-down back in the '60s.

BAND OF BOTS

True to form, in the admittedly early code we were playing, the single-player bots were still pretty vacant and not far elevated above the circle-driving, ally-shooting divots of *BF1942* – despite the fact they're more likely to listen to your radio commands. It's in multiplayer however, that *BFV* will always show its true worth. Moments like the first time I was fragged by a Bouncing Betty mine (whose modus operandi is to spring out of the ground to gut-level before exploding) were just so magical that I can barely wait



"Go on ahead, I'll have to find a meter."

ROLLING YOUR OWN

TERMINATE WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE AS THE TRICKSY NORTH VIETNAMESE BORROW CLASSIC EWOK BATTLE TACTICS

While climbing through the hills of the Ho Chi Minh trail, I'm sure you'll be amazed to find a recreation of part of the set of *The Swiss Family Robinson* – or, if you've seen it, a little known film called *Return Of The Jedi*. Yes, you too will be able to let loose the logs of war and watch them tumble down the hillside, flattening marines, disrupting tank movement and causing balance issues with passing imperial artillery. Logs – truly nature's weapon of choice.



Crush those ewoks... I mean, yanks.

to use the same dirty trick on unsuspecting *BF Vietnam* virgins as soon as the game goes live.

The vehicle physics and controls, meanwhile, are just as much fun (and fiendishly tricky) as they ever were. Helicopters are still bastards to fly, as the hours I wasted trying to hook tanks onto my Chinook will readily testify. But the practice and skill required for airborne manoeuvring has always been, in my opinion at least, one of *Battlefield*'s greatest, addiction-harbours assets.

There's no doubt that *Battlefield Vietnam*

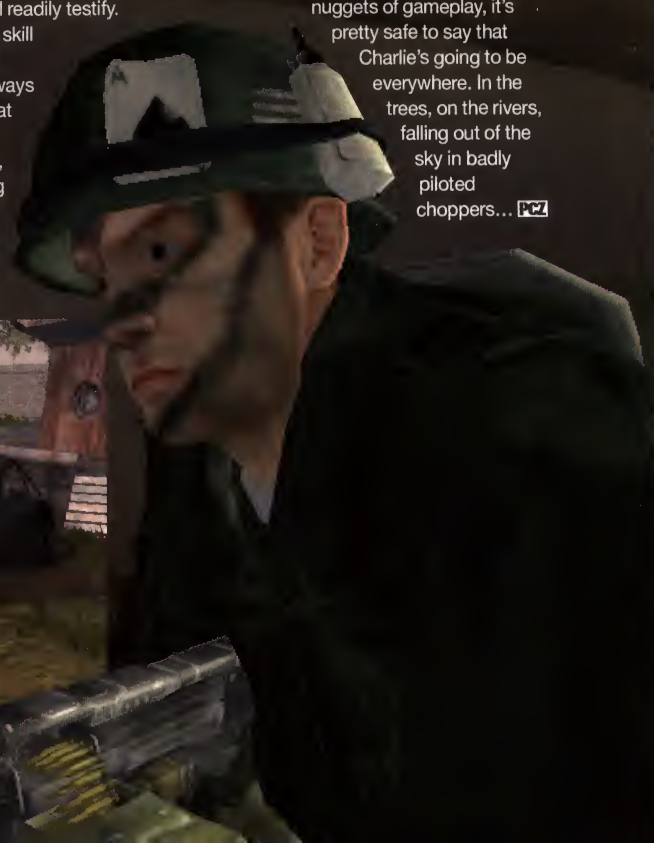
has huge potential, and that it has huge, looming rivals in the form of *Söldner: Secret Wars* and the delectable temptation that will be *Joint Operations*. If I were a betting man, however, I'd place my money on the *Battlefield* franchise. With such a ridiculously strong community and so many ingenious nuggets of gameplay, it's pretty safe to say that Charlie's going to be everywhere. In the trees, on the rivers, falling out of the sky in badly piloted choppers... [CZ]



A simple parking ticket would have been enough.



Are Black Hawks ever actually 'up'?





Sitting on the dock of a bay, watching the man-o-war sail away...

A fruity little number...

BIOSFEAR

Camouflage wasn't high on the armour vendor's priority list.

DEVELOPER Nako
PUBLISHER Tiscali Games
ETA February 10
WEBSITE www.biosfear.co.uk

- Fantasy and science fiction collide
- Up to 1,000 players can take part in a Castle Siege
- Easy-going and value for money compared to most MMOGs
- Citrus-powered economy



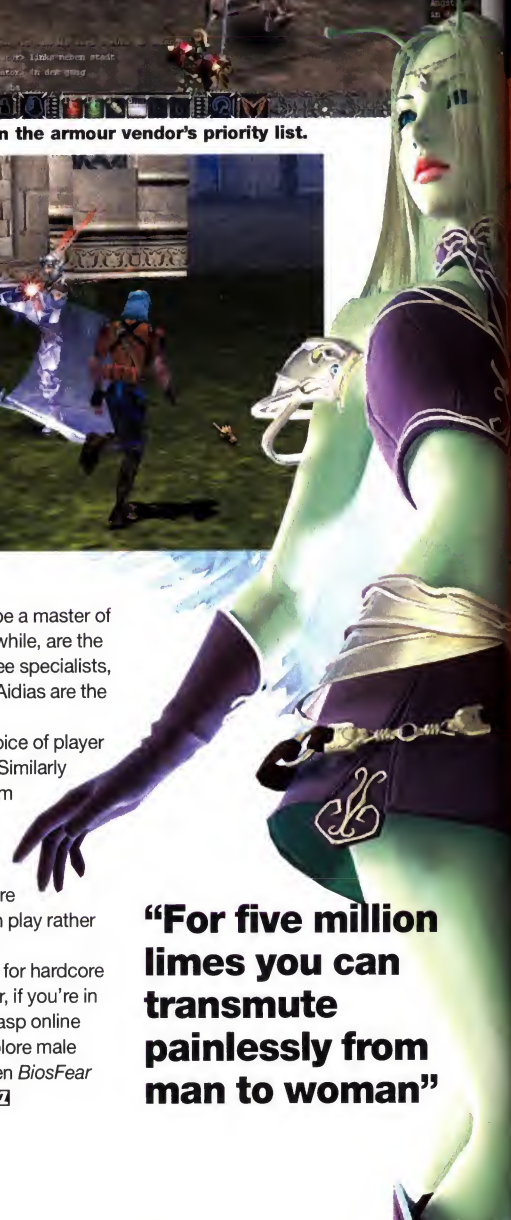
Don't worry, the rain'll have that out in a jiffy.

any other. Originally developed in South Korea (a place where games with names such as *Dyhard With Infinite Stairs* are far from being the exception), *Laghaim*, as it's natively known, boasts a cool 500,000 regular players. That being the case, there clearly has to be something going for it.

That something is the game's novel approach to guilds. Rather than fostering a rabble of gangs and barely organised tribes, *BioSFear's* limit on the number of players that can join each faction is almost unlimited, to the point where guilds can fight for the control of castles in pitched 1,000-player battles. Winners can then raise taxes from the locals to fund attacks.

Blue hair = coward.

No, it's not the widest choice of player careers we've been offered. Similarly abridged is the control system and graphical sheen of the game. Combat is point-and-click *Diablo*-style (still huge in Korea), and the graphics are designed to facilitate smooth play rather than wow the brain.



...the armour vendor's priority list.

...be a master of
...while, are the
...ee specialists,
...Aidias are the
...oice of player
...Similarly
...m
...re
...play rather
...for hardcore
...r, if you're in
...asp online
...lore male
...en *BiosFear*
...7

**"For five million
limes you can
transmute
painlessly from
man to woman"**

**“For five million
times you can
transmute
painlessly from
man to woman”**

COLD WAR CONFLICTS

DAYS IN THE FIELD 1950-1973



GamersHall - 84%
& Silver Award

Demonews - 82%

Features

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- Four Campaigns
- Eight combating countries with up to 50 different units each
- Over 37 missions
- Modern units such as jets, helicopters and more...
- Modern scenario editor
- Multiplayer (LAN/internet)

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FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE & REX MUNDI

THE MANIC and highly explosive nature of *Halo* was the setting for a very energetic Fight Club. A random game/map setting meant surprises were around every corner and when the rockets-only levels came up, you could barely move for flying limbs.

■ Thanks especially to Yayfur for joining Prezzer in a *Dukes Of Hazard*-style driving session. The mere fact he didn't bail out of the gunner's seat as Prezzer flipped our Warthog off the bonnets of any enemy driver in the vicinity is a testament to his bravery.

■ Disc editor Suzy enjoyed her first real taste of reader interaction, although her personal grudge match

with DopeFelon#1 left a bitter taste in the mouth. An accidental team kill led to a grudge (and fragging) match that lasted for several maps, until both parties agreed to disagree.

■ Standouts among the rest of the rampaging readers included SniperMK2, BlackDahlia, RaveBlade, DVA'-NINJA~, Vash and particularly Bakkufu, who consistently topped the leader boards.

■ *Call Of Duty* is the setting for next issue's fun and games, the match-up due to take place on March 4. Next month, we'll have war stories a-plenty for you. See you then.

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
 for all the info

WHO'S WHO

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Jamie Malcolm	Braveart
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Paul Presley	Prezzer
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Phil Wand	Wandy



Prezzer goes for an aerial view.



Bo and Luke brace themselves for take-off.



Bakkufu claims another victim - Will, in this case.



The readers show us the ropes (again).

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY APRIL 8

6.30pm - 9.00pm

Unreal 2 Expanded Multiplayer

THURSDAY MAY 6

6.30pm - 9.00pm

Unreal Tournament 2004

THURSDAY APRIL 1

6.30PM - 9.00PM

Battlefield Vietnam



That's gonna hurt in the morning...

ZONECHAT

IT'S GOOD TO TALK...

AN unqualified success.

Surely that's how the inaugural edition of ZONE Chat will go down in history. A fantastic turnout saw over a hundred of you firing your questions at the team, entering the 6.30pm Gaming Giveaway and laughing as Prezzer got temporarily chucked from the server for 'spamming'. Ahem. Thanks if you took part, but if you weren't able to make it you can find a complete log of the evening at www.zonegames.co.uk.

Following the free-for-all nature of last month's initial foray, this time round we want things a touch more structured. Topics will include your most memorable gaming moments, the treatment of gaming in the mass media and, in keeping with this month's feature, your ideas to make games better. The best answer (in our opinion) to the last one will receive a fabulous star prize – so get your thinking caps on.

So what do you need to get hooked up? Obviously, you'll require some sort of IRC program – we recommend mIRC (www.mirc.com) as the most straightforward and easy to use. Once installed and set up, log on to a



**WEDNESDAY
MARCH 10
5.00PM – 7.00PM**

Quakenet server (irc.uk.quakenet.org), then type /join #pcz to enter the PC ZONE channel. You'll find a whole gaggle of your fellow ZONERS there, eager to hold court on matters of great importance. Or just what's in the mag this month.

So gird your loins, get out your spelling hats and get ready to fire your questions to the team. The next ZONE Chat takes place Wednesday March 10. Let's see if we can't smash the attendance records sky high this time!

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL LOVES IT WHEN A LAN COMES TOGETHER...

A lot happening this month, so...

■ The Bad LAN Rising team (www.badlanrising.com) is hosting a small interim event on March 12-14 for 50 gamers. It will be called the Lacking A Name event (LAN, geddit?) and is priced at £20. Priority to regulars and locals.

■ The next event for www.clanlan.net is on March 5-7, but if you're not a PC ZONE subscriber, you may have missed that 25-person Merseyside event already.

■ LAN Rover regulars may remember www.flintfrag.co.uk which hosts regular one-day parties in the Holiday Inn on the A55, North Wales. Its next event falls on March 21 and costs £10.

■ www.centralanuk.co.uk in Stoke is planning Centralan UK, for £25 a head, at the same time as www.wolfan.com in Edwinstowe, East Midlands (£20 per head). These events are both running from April 2-4.

■ Regular South-east party planners at www.lanse.co.uk are holding a three-day party from March 12 for £20. There are discounts for four or more if you book together and it's also offering a £1,000 cash prize in a Savage

competition (see page 96 for more).

■ www.scotlandparty.com is counting down to event number nine on March 26-28 in Aberdeen's Sports Hall. £20 if you pay in advance – and with 35 spaces, you'd be wise to do so quick.

■ As we move towards summer and the events start to pop up, I'll be changing the look of the LAN Rover and will be showing a location-based LAN list – or at least will try to assemble them from north to south! Let me know of your event at the early stages of planning at scalper@gglaan.co.uk. Till next month, Scalper out.



A £1,000 Savage prize is on offer at Lanse.

GUILDHALL



▲ LOVE IS IN THE AIR. AND THE CLAN

Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

CLAN Freaky Voodoo Magic -IFVMI-
CONTACT Voodoo_Chef, via website
WEBSITE www.z0r.co.uk/fvmi

MAIN GAMES Battlefield 1942, Desert Combat

DETAILS We're a fun-loving clan who play mainly to enjoy the games we play. But we do like to win. We play fair and play well. So come along and see if you want to join us!

CLAN Dogs Of War UK
CONTACT coldkilla_dowuk@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.dowclanuk.co.uk

MAIN GAMES Medal Of Honor, Call Of Duty and occasionally Battlefield 1942

DETAILS We're a two-year-old clan, about 40-strong, but looking for new pups to join our pack. We have our own servers and play in leagues and friendlies. We only accept 18+ members because we don't want our grisly old dogs to feel left out! Come and try us out – you'll be welcome to join us on voice comms too. As we say: "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog!"

CLAN Government Issue [-GI-]

CONTACT Any of the team leaders from the website
WEBSITE www.gi-clan.co.uk

MAIN GAMES Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault and Breakthrough

DETAILS Come and join the #1 clan in the Clanbase Euro Liberation ladder. We're always looking for some mature players who will fit in with the motley crew we've assembled over the last year. We have members from across Britain and even Scandinavia and the USA. Apply now!

CLAN RS Red Squadrons

CONTACT highcommand@redsquadrons.org
WEBSITE www.redsquadrons.org

MAIN GAMES Ghost Recon, Battlefield 1942, Medal Of Honor, Counter-Strike, Bridge Commander, Star Trek: Armada I & II and others

DETAILS Red Squadrons was formed in 1998 as a Star Trek clan. We've now ventured into other games, in a new section of the clan called the Marine Divisions. We now have servers in BF, C-S, MOH and Elite Force. We look forward to seeing you online.

CLAN 58th Marine Corp

CONTACT Bountyhunter75 via website
WEBSITE www.58thmarinecorp.com
MAIN GAMES PlanetSide

DETAILS We're one of the top-ranking PlanetSide outfits based on the Werner server and fighting for the New Conglomerate. If you're looking for a friendly and well-organised outfit, go to the website and sign up now.

CLAN \$Outlaw\$-International

CONTACT elmer@outlawinternational.com
WEBSITE www.outlawsinternational.com

MAIN GAMES Call Of Duty, Medal Of Honor

DETAILS The 30 strong \$Outlaw\$ unit has been gaming together in the MOH and COD community since July 2002. We play every night and run a 32-player Jolt-powered server. We run a comprehensive stats bot too, so you can see how you're ranking! The \$Outlaw\$ is a friendly clan with the emphasis on playing for fun. Visit our site and introduce yourself. All challenges accepted.

To feature in Guildhall, simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC Zone, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

WORLD OF SPORT

Steve Hill embarks on a gruelling pentathlon to bring you the low-down on EA Sports' online range

AS EA Sports never tires of telling us, "it's in the game". What 'it' is has never really been specified – a recipe for jam? The missing link? Whatever, the punters lap it up in their droves nevertheless. With 'that Internet' now firmly established as more than a passing fad, the powers that be have deemed that the time is right to bring 'it' online. And with EA still refusing to play ball with Xbox Live, the PC is the only place to play these games as nature intended.

Getting involved is a simple matter of owning one or more of

the relevant games, and once you have joined EA's online cabal, your membership is good for all titles. Each game comes with a 14-day free trial, which can be extended to a year by typing in a special code that's found in the box. Finding a match-up is a case of sifting through lobby rooms or simply hitting Quick Match and hoping for the best. Some matches require tokens to enter, with the winner taking the pot (minus a ten per cent admin fee), and organised tournaments offer further prizes.

Quitters (players who log out before a game ends) are a problem, so each member is given a disconnection percentage based on their history, whether they quit intentionally or due to technical issues. Although there seems to be a certain amount of integrity among sport fans, the arsehole quotient is only marginally less than in other genres, and it's still a long way from being a sporting utopia. But if you've got the patience there's a fairly healthy scene out there, and at least you won't need a shower afterwards.



Finding a game online is simple and straightforward.



More popular in Europe.



Now that looks good.

FIFA 2004

■ £29.99 | Dev: EA Canada | ETA: Out Now |
Review: Issue 136, Score 81%

AS THE world's greatest sport, this should be the jewel in the EA Sports' online crown. However, the servers are a bit unreliable, with mysterious disconnections ruining many a decent match. Conspiracy theorists could point to EA Sports' US prejudice, as while the bespoke UK lobbies are generally quite busy, those in North America rarely play host to more than single figures.

When it works, it provides a wholly decent game of association football,

scarcely any different from having someone sat next to you. Perfectly geared to cup tournaments and leagues, this is something that we could feasibly find ourselves getting involved with on a regular basis.

One thing to bear in mind is that without the recent patch applied, you may find a number of gamepads refuse to work. Luckily, EA Sports' auto-update feature should sort things out a treat, leaving you to enjoy the beautiful game.



Veron finally finds someone to support him.

NHL 2004

■ £29.99 | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now |
Review: Issue 134, Score 82%

FIRST OFF, what a fantastic game. Superb graphics, immaculate presentation and fluid gameplay make for some cracking action, even if you don't give a flying puck about ice hockey. Online, the experience is near-identical, although the action is tempered by the odd bit of choppiness, particularly if playing against someone in the States. But with quite a few Scandinavians getting involved, there are opportunities to play closer to home, and it's worth seeking out the Euro lobbies.

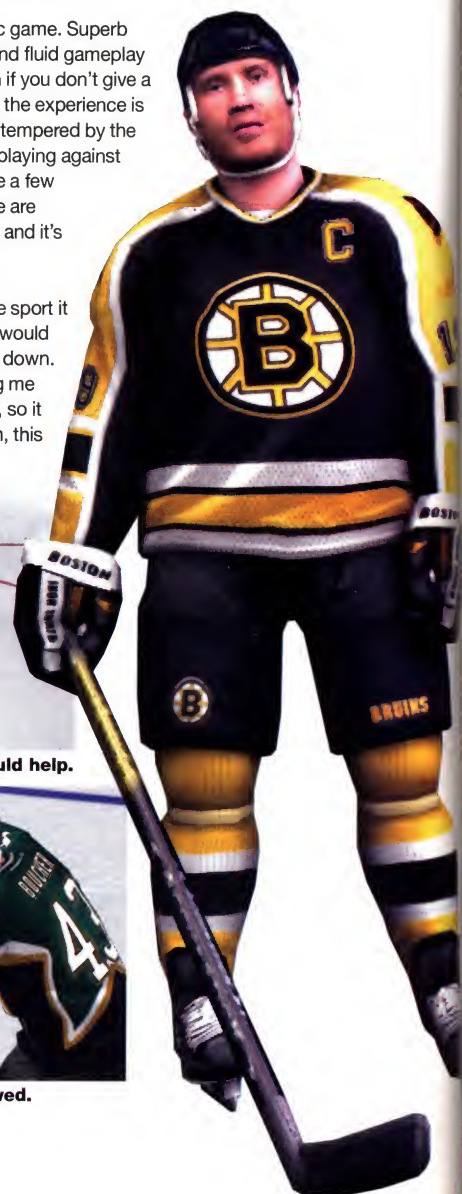
An array of tournament options is available, and due to the nature of the sport it would be a fairly churlish player who would log out just because he's a few goals down. That said, I had an opponent begging me not to quit during one of the intervals, so it must go on. Despite the odd problem, this is one game I would play for free.



Laggy, but European interest should help.



A friendly experience for all involved.



NBA LIVE 2004

■ £29.99 | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now | Review: Issue 138, Score 74%



ANOTHER slick production from the EA conveyor belt, basketball successfully translates online, with the key difference that someone else is sat cursing at his monitor as well. No real sign of lag, it's an extremely fast affair; in fact almost too quick for the unpractised

player to keep up with. To the untrained eye, it may seem to be a case of running to one end of the court and chucking the ball in the hoop, but there are subtleties, and the Americans that make up the bulk of players appear to have mastered them, dishing out heavy beatings to unsuspecting Brits.

Length of games and so forth can be set by the host, and the usual array of match-ups and tournaments are available. In addition, one-to-one practice enables you to select the NBA player of your choice and go man-to-man with an opponent on a suitably urban court. Word.



It'll never catch on.



Shoot or pass? Pass! Pass!



Time to catch your breath while the Americans score.



It must make sense to someone?

MADDEN 2004

■ £29.99 | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: Out Now | Review: Issue 136, Score 80%

AMERICAN football may be as mysterious to us as rugby is to the Yanks (or to Brits who haven't jumped on the World Cup bandwagon). They take it seriously over there though, and the *Madden* games are undeniably a phenomenal piece of work, even if you

haven't got a clue what you're supposed to be doing.

Online, it's the same story, and though it's tempting to quit at 48-0 down, common decency insists that you take your beating like a man. You might even get the hang of it – if I can manage a touchdown, anyone can.

Defending is less fun than attacking, but there is the perversely satisfying knowledge that someone, somewhere, is having a good time. Most of those people are in the US, but the game nevertheless manages to get through an entire match without a hint of lag.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

■ £34.99 | Dev: Headgate Studios | ETA: Out Now | Review: Issue 135, Score 81%

LOYAL fans of *PC ZONE*'s NeverQuest series will have had a flavour of online golf last month, and it's a similar story on the return visit. The nature of the sport makes for a more sedate experience, and it's a good idea to have something else to do while you're playing it. The advantage *Tiger Woods* has over its more adrenalin-based counterparts is that you can actually have a chat with your fellow players.

Match-ups are readily available, with players competing from all over Europe and the States. Surprisingly, there are lag issues, with shots being taken off-camera and even players merging into each

other. It doesn't really affect the gameplay though, and a modicum of patience should see you while away a few hours. That said, it makes it even more galling when your opponent suddenly pisses off as you're teeing off for the final hole. Bleedin' French...



Tiger Woods? More Badger Thicket.



Online, your custom appearance can really pay off.





"Intensely involving and rewarding" PC Zone



"Immersive, story driven brilliance" 93% PC Gamer



"Expertly accomplished" PC Format



LOAD IT

- Eliminate two security guards
- Find elevator down to street
- Discover head of rival faction
- Talk to him
- Persuade him to abandon the conflict
- World shifts towards peace and prosperity



LEAVE IT

- Move stealthily past two security guards
- Meet informant on street
- Bribe him, buy sniper rifle with cash
- Use to execute head of rival faction
- Security bots close in, you and 12 bystanders are killed
- World shifts towards military tyranny



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www.planethalflife.com/ios

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb finally makes it out of goal



Finding servers is tricky, but worth it.



Not happy, but then he is German.



Brings a whole new meaning to the term 'hand ball'.



The arm-stretching exercises paid off.

I WAS never much good at football. Having a near total lack of co-ordination meant I was banished to the role of goalkeeper – always blamed for a defeat and never rewarded for a win. I was scarred for life. That is, of course, until the arrival of mods like this. Now I, too, can have my glory.

IOS is both a footie fix for the fan who just can't get enough, and a lot of fun for the sportingly challenged who want to try a different type of mod and don't feel the need to hop into the showers with 20 blokes after.

Everyone knows the rules of football – you grab the ball, foul everyone who tries to take it away from you, and slam it into the opposing net. However, what's neat here is the way that the rapidly ageing *Half-Life* engine is used to recreate it.

Despite the geriatric underpinnings, the game works fairly well – and once you get the hang of the controls and make some allowances for the fact you haven't just splashed out 40 quid for a dedicated football sim, it should stir up some grins. Player models are well crafted and the

stadium atmosphere is captured well, too.

What does let it down a bit is the usual *Half-Life* problem of not being able to play with bots (apart from goalkeepers). So, if you want a game it has to be on a LAN or online. The latter is the better option because there are enough servers around to find a game, and LAN play probably isn't a practical option.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

68

Premiership wannabe

KANONBALL V1.1

SIZE 43MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*

www.planethalflife.com/kanonball

Tony Lamb dons his spandex pants and floats like a Kanonball

ANOTHER football-style mod, but with a few twists and variations. Gone are the regulation shirts and shorts, along with the concrete stands, mud and grass of the current game. Instead we have a natty selection of red and blue spandex that Justin Hawkins of The Darkness would be proud of, and a plethora of ultra-futuristic arenas. The basic idea of slamming the ball into the

opposition's net hasn't changed, but the manner of getting it there owes more to a hyped-up blend of rugby, gymnastics and *Speedball*. It's like filling a field with Vinnie Jones clones and telling them to score goals by any means necessary – although they'd kick your head in for putting them in spandex.

What gives *Kanonball* its atmosphere is the sheer range of moves you can pull while carrying the ball. Rolls, dives, swerves, leaps and slides are all in the repertoire, and the skilful player will use all of them to avoid getting tackled before throwing the ball into the goal.

As with the *IOS* mod, there aren't any bots, so LAN or online play is again the only choice.

TOTAL CONVERSION

Speed: SLOW
Powerjump: SHORT
Fumble: RARE
Damage: SEVERE
Resistance: EXTREME
Catching Radius: SHORT
Throwing Speed: FAST



Plenty of special moves await.

Unfortunately, online support is very weak, but the speed of *Kanonball* and its varied gameplay makes it a good LAN-play proposition when the few online servers are unavailable. Fun and futuristic, it falls somewhere between football and bare-knuckle boxing – plus you can wear spandex without being laughed at in the street.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

72

Bangin' good fun



Not exactly a look Beckham will be going for. Maybe Victoria...



Servers are sparsely populated.



All the characters insisted on showing off their catalogue poses.



Four laps left, empty nitros. Bad.



Get your motor running...



Racking up the style points - in second place.

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

MULTIPLAYER

■ £34.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Black Box | ETA: Out Now | www.needforspeed.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES P4 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband connection

It's cursor keys versus dual analogue pads as Will Sargent takes illegal street racing to another level

HAVING slapped a PC ZONE Essential sticker on the bonnet of *Need for Speed: Underground* back in issue 137, imagine the hysteria on finding its multiplay offers PC versus PlayStation 2 duels. We dream daily of tackling our console cousins online with *Pro Evo*, but this is a most welcome aperitif.

How on earth does EA do it? Well, here's the catch. The only way to play any *NFSU* game online is via its dedicated servers. Yes, that means no modem-free LAN play at all. You've got to log on to EA's 'lobby', open an account by

setting your user name and password, choose up to four opponents to race (harder than it sounds), and then log back on to post results. The machine which set the race up becomes the server during the actual race. All clever stuff, but it doesn't hide that fact that console spods at least have the option of single-telly, split-screen, whereas we get chuff all. Charming.

EA-SY DOES IT

Ironically, EA's big brother approach hasn't stopped the cheating. A rolling message in the lobby apologises for the lack of a current league table, due to hacking. Could disgruntled LANsters be behind such stunts?

On a positive note, there's a reliable system in place to grade

players by ability. The temptation to take on some punk rated 'impossible' proved too great, but we were soon to regret such impudence as he sprayed our windscreen with gravel and then proceeded to lap us three times - in a two-lap race. Understandably, there was more fun to be had toying with 'easy' and 'even'-rated racers, although inexperienced drivers did seem to be a little thin on the ground.

It's nigh on impossible to tell whether you're playing against a

console jockey or a PC racer, so congratulations must go to EA's men in white coats for pulling off such a feat. Interestingly enough, developer Black Box reckons the two versions are nigh on identical, with both using exactly the same cars, scenery and AI. PS2 gamers do tend to suffer a blurring effect at high speeds (an anti-aliasing trick to compensate for lower frame-rates), but the advantage of those sublime dual analogue controllers over our coffee-stained cursor keys

more or less evens things out.

You'll also be pleased to learn that cherished vehicles which have been tuned, modded and nitro-ed to high heaven in single-player can be used in ranked races online, where you can choose any course and number of laps. What's more, unranked races use some powerful predetermined marques.

FEEL THE NEED

We're pleased to see that drag and drift races are available when you're burning rubber with friends, alongside the demanding circuit loops. The drag racing sections truly capture the magic of the recent *The Fast And The Furious* flicks, and these one-on-one cock-fights make for a refreshing change after endless laps of spittle-covered urban wasteland. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

MIDNIGHT CLUB II

Reviewed Issue 133, Score 81%

Employs Rockstar's special brand of carefree violence, in familiar real-world cities, but pales when compared to *Underground*'s advanced visuals and overall polish.

TOCA RACE DRIVER

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 76%

Introduced a storyline to the once pedestrian touring car scene, while a wonderful physics engine guarantees you'll crash just to see bits drop off.

"It's nigh on impossible to tell whether you're playing a console or PC racer"



Lesson one: choose an 'even' opponent, not 'impossible'.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW ISSUE 137	85
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	70
Community-minded but LAN-lite	


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COMMUNITY CHEST



IL-2 STURMOVIK

How do you make a near-perfect flight sim even better? Daniel Emery has some ideas...

IL-2 Sturmovik is, without a doubt, the best WWII flight sim on the market – and that's before you take the superb add-ons into the equation. There are community aircraft developed from scratch which drop seamlessly into the plane set, plus an untold number of skins to customise your plane and bonus missions, along with guides and tweaks galore. However, unlike some other games, the engine powering *IL-2* doesn't allow for any total conversions, so there's a finite framework that modders work within. Nevertheless, there's a veritable feast of goodies out there. These are eight of the best...



IL-2 SKINS (SKINS)

www.il2skins.com

Not a collection of neo-Nazi skinheads with a penchant for flight sims, but a collection of graphical overlays to customise the look of your aircraft. Want to turn a drab B25 into General Doolittle's personal aircraft? No problem. In fact, there are over 8,000 different skins to choose from here.



IL-2 CENTRE (FANSITE)

www.il2center.com

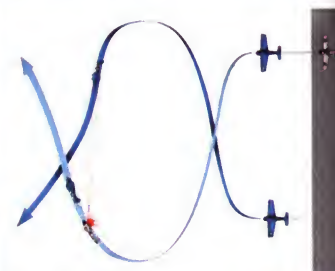
The mother of add-ons. This is where you'll find almost every new aircraft in development – including a large number being done by Oleg Maddox himself. There's also a stack of missions and guides – the only drawback is that downloadable files seem to be scattered across the globe, so mileage may vary.



IL-2 MANAGER 4.0 FB (UTILITY)

www.checksix-fr.com

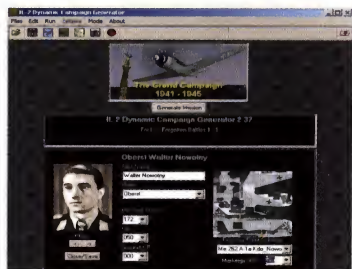
Buried in this French site is the Manager 4.0 FB. This handy utility enables you to get behind the wires and configure *IL-2* to the nth degree. But if your grasp of French isn't much better than Rene in 'Allo 'Allo, then check our cover discs to save you from a headache.



MUDMOVERS (MISSIONS)

mudmovers.com/Sims/IL2/index.htm

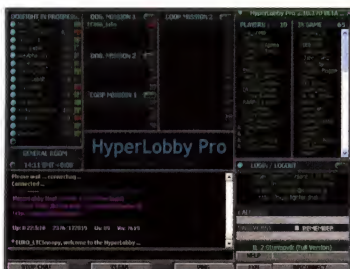
A one-stop shop if you want to improve your flying skills or you're having trouble getting off the ground. There's also a plethora of downloadable campaigns, all historically accurate – well, in so much as we know, info on Germany in early 1945 is sketchy at best. Oh, what a luvverly war.



DCG CAMPAIGN GENERATOR (UTILITY)

members.shaw.ca/lowengrin

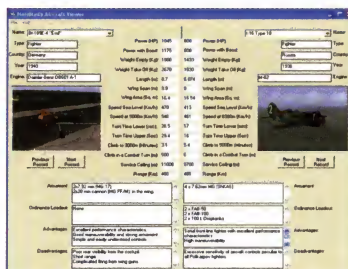
Based on the Dynamic Campaign Generator for *Combat Flight Simulator 2*, this generates missions for both *IL-2* and *Forgotten Battles*. There are 12 to choose from, including Stalingrad and Normandy, and also a couple of grand campaigns that span the entire war. Sweet!



HYPERLOBBY (UTILITY)

hyperfighter.jinak.cz

An essential for the discerning propeller head, HyperLobby searches for online servers to enable you to go head-to-head or just talk rubbish with other flyboys. One caution – it does use a specific port and reply protocol, all of which means that you'll need to open a slot in your firewall. Nice utility, mind.



AIRCRAFT VIEWER DEMO (UTILITY)

www.netwings.org

Ever wondered what separates a FW-190 x and a FW-190 y? Want to compare the relative performance and weapon loads of opposing aircraft? There's been no easy way to do this in *IL-2* – until now. This is a basic demo of the new aircraft viewer for *IL-2*, which is still in development.



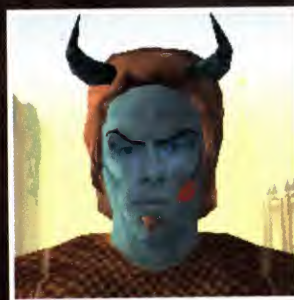
ZENO'S WARBLIND VIDEO DRIVE-IN (GUIDES)

www.zenoswarbirdvideos.com

It's not often that computer games and reality meet, but accurate flight sims are the exception. Zeno's website is full of the original training videos used during WWII. True, the film quality isn't perfect, but you can use the basic lessons in *IL-2*. Plus, it's a great diversion from work.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill attempts to remain vertical in *Horizons: Empire Of Istaria*



"JUST when I thought I was out, they pull me back in." Following the breath of fresh air that was last month's golf-oriented escapade – where I swapped dank dungeon for lush greenery, and broadsword for putting wedge – I'm unfortunately back on familiar ground. If the name and the box weren't clue enough, the installation screens confirm my worst fears; a chilling collage of armour-sporting gimps, club-wielding monsters and cities in

Sarus Lennan, replete with a set of horns and a tail. As the smoke clears, I receive the message: "Welcome to The World of Istaria. You have entered Wind!" This is certainly a first, considering my diet.

RACE RELATIONS

It seems that I've fallen through a trapdoor and landed on the planet prog-rock, all artfully angled rock formations, glowing crystals and dragons. Yes, dragons. Talking dragons,

lesser races are not worthy to learn the secrets of our scales. That means you, soft-skin." Grizelean is no more helpful, sneering: "Hrmph... Trust a biped to ask a dragon for help. Get out of here."

What is this, Nazi Germany? It's just another form of racism, despite the rules clearly stating that "Harassment on the basis of race, color (sic), national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability or any other similar criteria, for any reason or in any form, is prohibited and will not be tolerated." Plain as day.

Deciding not to tolerate it, I get my tailed arse out of there, crossing a rope bridge into a green and pleasant land. With its rolling hills – and surly dragons – it could almost be Wales. Unfortunately, it's no more interesting and I'm soon on the first teleporter out of Dodge, setting course for Kion. Slightly more lively, it seems to be home to some kind of a dragon airport, with winged beasts landing on a regular basis all around.

COW TROUBLE

Remembering my brief to 'team up with a dragon character and go off on an adventure', I sidle up to a likely-looking sort and whisper "Hi, dragon breath."

"Hi," replies Bloodyth.

"What's going on here then?" I ask.

"REU Guild."

"REU?"

"Sorry, I'm French. Don't you understand reunion, rendezvous?"

"How do I join?"

"Non, it's not a group."

In a sudden moment of clarity, the realisation dawns that I'm talking to a French dragon, and I hastily bid Bloodyth au revoir. For some reason, I feel slightly sullied by the experience. It's a bit like being kissed by a ladyboy (I should know, having recently returned from Thailand).

"With its rolling hills and surly dragons, it could be Wales. Unfortunately, it's no more interesting and I soon leave..."

Looking to purge myself, I seek solace in a long walk and am mildly surprised to stumble across a cow – although not as surprised as the cow is when I attempt to milk the creature using an axe.

TALES FROM TOPOGRAPHIC OCEANS

Increasingly depressed, I book myself a break on Floating Island, a deserted paradise where the only people I meet are Wei and Eri, a couple of American stoners in London, who invite me to "grab a spliff and get comfortable". Dropping effortlessly into narcotic lexicography, I point out that I've been caning the purple

haze since I got up. They seem impressed, remarking, "that's the spirit".

I casually make small talk about how empty the place is, and one of them points out that it is the early hours of Monday morning. "What about the Yanks?" I ask innocently, somehow sparking a row in

which Wei explains to Eri that "us New York dandle doodles r better than you hillbilly rednecks". Oops.

Deciding that diplomacy isn't my strong point, I leave them to continue their drug-crazed frenzy and bid them goodnight. "OK bro, see you later," says Eri, which is at least more friendly than the cocking dragons...

I hit the town in search of entertainment, but it's noticeably thin on the ground. The only other person I see is Adis Souldrinker, who I wisely decide to give a wide berth. So wide, in fact, that I inadvertently stagger into a stream and find myself sunk up to the tail in turquoise water. Golf, anyone? [P2]



The cow wasn't expecting that, now was it?

the sky. It's almost too much to bear, and I occupy myself elsewhere, checking back only to see a bloke with horns going at an oversized insect, and finally, a feral wolf howling balefully at a crimson moon. Jesus wept.

In an attempt to ease my passage, Online Zone editor Prezzer has been busy fluffing a character for me to take over. Hence, I enter this world as

no less. With nothing to lose, I attempt to strike up a conversation with the nearest beast, Sandava, who promptly tells me to "come back when you've grown wings and can breath fire". Charmed, I'm sure. I have no more luck with Juquenas, who scoffs: "As

much as we might wish to help the lesser races, I'm afraid I cannot help you."

Even worse, his mate Resiata chips in with: "The



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RAID AWAY



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ A colleague of mine heard his brand-new 120GB Western Digital drive making peculiar 'click, clack' noises one night. Thinking nothing of it, he awoke the following morning to find that the unit had wound itself down and expired, never to work again. While the Western warranty covered the failed unit, there'd be no way of rebuilding the lost files nor accounting for the mental torment of losing so much data.

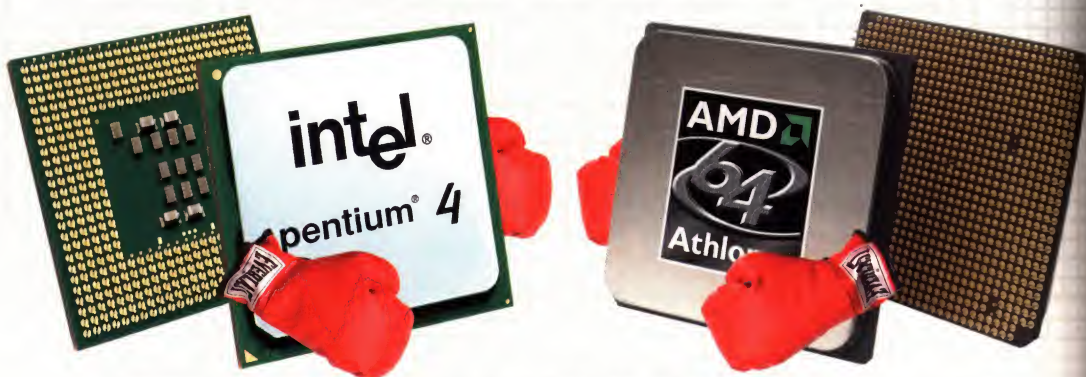
On hearing his story, I decided it would be prudent to build a filesaver with multiple drives, where all my important files would be redundantly recorded across several disks. In the event of failure, I'd simply swap out the dead drive and replace it – the likelihood of all units going wobbly at the same time being extremely unlikely.

I bought pairs of new drives and pooled key data from all the workstations on my network onto a brand-new 160GB Samsung in readiness for when the filesaver was complete. And you guessed it, within a very short space of time, the new Samsung was dead (along with my kettle, an old Pentium and a light bulb). It booted up and appeared on the desktop, but Windows 'saw' the wrong physical data and the extended partition – which contained all my most important files, from benchmarking images to music files – wasn't there any more.

▼ The moral of the story is, always have a spare kettle.

2004 Processors Confirmed

We already knew that 2004 would be an exciting year. Here's confirmation



Windows XP 64-bit Edition tests look very promising for the Athlon. Can AMD sock it to Intel?

IF YOU'VE BEEN window shopping on the Web recently, you'll have seen Intel's new 90nm chip on sale, and you'll have read the disappointing reviews that highlight Prescott's slightly underwhelming performance in benchmarks. But don't go reading too much into the reports that the new processor's abilities are identical to its predecessor, because that couldn't be further from the truth. Prescott's only real downside is that it huffs a lot of power and gets seriously hot when pushed – the money you set aside for more RAM or a new video card would be better invested in proper cooling.

P4 PHWOAH?

So what makes Prescott so good? Cast your mind back to the autumn of 2000 and the introduction of the first Pentium 4. Consider just how far removed today's 3.4GHz, hyper-threading, 800FSB extreme edition P4 monsters are from those clunky 180nm chips. So while the Prescott might not be the quantum leap everyone was expecting, its long-term potential is huge and that's what counts. But before you jump in to upgrade, consider that the 478-pin arrangement is a dead end – you'd be far better off waiting for the LGA-775 chips, due out in the spring.

BRINGING UP THE REAR

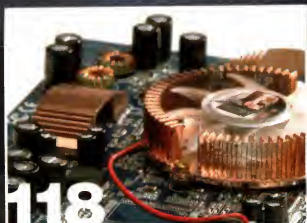
The same is true for AMD fans, although as usual, AMD roadmaps are utterly confusing affairs with so many product variants and silly model numbering to take in and understand. To cut to the chase, it'd be wise to swerve the socket 940 arrangement seen in the current FX

OUT	INTEL	AMD
NOW	P4 Extreme Edition 3.4GHz, Socket 478, 130nm	Athlon 64 FX-51 2.2GHz, Socket 940, 130nm
	P4 3.4GHz, Socket 478, 90nm	Athlon 64 3400+ 2.2GHz, Socket 754, 130nm
APRIL	P4 Extreme Edition 3.4GHz, Socket 775, 130nm	Athlon 64 FX-53 2.4GHz, Socket 939, 130nm
	P4 3.6GHz, Socket 775, 90nm	Athlon 64 3700+ 2.4GHz, Socket 939, 130nm
JULY	P4 3.8GHz, Socket 775, 90nm	
OCTOBER	P4 4.0GHz, Socket 775, 90nm	Athlon 64 FX-55 2.6GHz, Socket 939, 90nm
		Athlon 64 4000+ 2.6GHz, Socket 939, 90nm
		Athlon XP 3000+, Socket 754, 130nm
NEXT YEAR	'Tejas', Socket 775, 90nm	'Toledo', Socket 939, 90nm

chips, and instead wait for the 939-pin variant which should arrive at the same time as LGA Intel rivals. Unlike Intel, AMD's 90nm process chips won't be on UK shelves until Christmas, so there's little point dilly-dallying until then.

And if you're wondering if a 64-bit Athlon makes any difference to your gaming, expect to see an AMD system review here shortly. Microsoft's Windows XP 64-bit Edition preview has already shown that revised code can help the AMD processors pull out quite a margin in the benchmarks, and it'll be interesting to see what happens in games.

"The Prescott might not be the quantum leap we were expecting, but its long-term potential is huge"



REVIEWS

Voluptuous video card to go



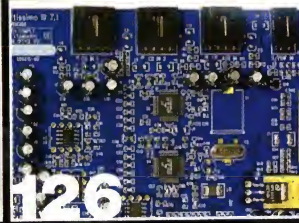
REVIEWS

Dell delivers in style



DEAR WANDY

Doctor doctor, give me the news



BUYER'S GUIDE

Get your retail therapy fix here

DRIVE BY WIRELESS

New wi-fi products will enable you to talk with your car after you've parked it and gone indoors. Now that's clever...

ROCKFORD Corporation (www.rockfordcorp.com), juggernaut of the in-car entertainment world is making waves in the wireless world under the guise of Omnifi. As well as household streaming products, the sister company's line-up includes a digital media player for the car (around \$299) which receives close to 300 hours of digital audio in MP3 or WMA (Windows Media Audio) format over wireless.

The unit is in stores now, enabling you to upload music, news and other information direct to your motor from your PC indoors. No more carting CDs about, no more burning special compilations. Upload your entire CD collection if you like, or leave your computer downloading overnight and have it automatically upload all the data for you by the time you set off for work the next morning.

Also on offer is a mobile digital media player (around \$699), which includes SimpleCenter software for Windows (ya boo sucks again, Mac owners). This snags TV listings, horoscopes, weather and Audible.com audio books, as well as syndicated shows and all manner of tailored information from the Internet. It then automatically uploads it to your wheels at a preset time. SimpleCenter can even snag Internet radio stations while you're not on the move, which means you can play them back when you get back behind the wheel.

Although Rockford Fosgate is one of the most successful brands in car stereo history, as with many top names I find the 'Rockford sound' lacking depth, Americanised and far too pricey for my liking. The same is true of Alpine and Bose, companies whose marketing departments do a fantastic job of turning average products into sales success. So the good news is that other manufacturers are sure to follow suit, same as they did with MP3 players two years ago, and we'll soon have a wide choice of in-car entertainment hardware.



As well as wi-fi audio products, Rockford has recently announced a wireless car video player, enabling drivers to enjoy downloads from left-handed websites while stuck in traffic.

"You can upload music, news and other information direct to your motor from your PC. No more carting CDs about or burning special compilations"

MULTI VNC

Easy remote desktop management

Visitors to Wandy Towers are a rude lot, commandeering my PC and demanding cups of tea. Some don't have broadband and use mine as a stop-gap; others use mine for dialling into their machines at home. Everyone uses VNC for this purpose, a free tool that enables you to browse a remote machine as though you were sat in front of it. I've recently migrated to SmartCode VNC Manager, which adds all the features that VNC is missing - multiple connections and connection management. It's a bit slow and costs \$35, but works brilliantly. You'll never use plain VNC again. www.s-code.com

DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Software Installation Utility	5.1.1.1002	12 Dec 03	1.4MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	3.13	3 Nov 03	12.9MB	www.nvidia.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.7	7 Oct 03	5.4MB	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.96 Beta	4 Feb 04	2.25MB	www.viaarena.com NEW

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.1	19 Jan 04	25.9MB	www.ati.com NEW
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	53.03	9 Dec 03	8.5MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADVANCED HD Update	EAX4DRV	19 Nov 03	13.8MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0051	06 Oct 03	10.1MB	m-audio.com

SNIPPETS

9700 GOES WALKIES



If you read my review of the Alienware Area-51m laptop on page 120, you'll see it features ATI's Mobility Radeon 9600, a card which offers mid-range desktop performance from a slither of notebook hardware that would fit into your shirt pocket and leave room for a pen. The Canadian graphics company has just announced its bigger brother, the Mobility Radeon 9700, offering better performance and more laptop-friendly features. Expect to see the new card in many big name products, including Alienware. www.ati.com

TINY WANT BIG



Tiny Computers has recently relaunched itself as Tiny.com, with a goal of beating other online vendors on price and expanding to a 10 per cent market share in the UK. Perhaps crucially, its phone lines will stay open. "Tiny.com will continue to offer a telephone advice service and take orders by telephone," says Brian Boys, general manager. Although arch rival Dabs.com is often criticised for not publicising phone numbers, people seem to forget that Amazon gets by without them just fine. www.tiny.com

WEAKER HERCULES



Hercules wrote to me recently regarding a specification change to its famous 3D Prophet All-In-Wonder 9800 SE - yes, you know, the one you can turn into a Pro. Until recently, all 9800 SE boards were sold with a 340MHz memory clock speed, but from now on will feature 300MHz, in line with ATI reference guidelines. The physical hardware remains the same, and the Hercules is the only board of its type you can buy at retail. europe.hercules.com

MEDIAXTENDER

■ Price: £57 | Manufacturer: Gainward | Phone: 01635 524949 | www.gainward.co.uk

External 5.1 soundcard with 6-in-1 card reader and teasmaid

SOUNDCARD

NOW here's a cute little thing. The MediaXtender connects to any PC over USB 2.0, and will plug and play as a driver-free external soundcard, six-in-one card reader and a USB hub. With holes fore and aft, you'll find S/PDIF optical in and out for Dolby AC-3 audio decoding (although the term 'Dolby Digital' is notably absent from the packaging and documentation). There's also microphone, headphones and line-in mini jacks, along with two USB 2.0 ports; plus slots for CompactFlash, Smart Media, SecureDigital, MicroDrive, Memory Stick and MMC cards.

In addition, there's a 5V power input to bolster USB current and a remote control for media applications. It's aimed at laptop and Shuttle owners,



whose lack of internal space means the only way to expand the multimedia capabilities of their hardware is to 'go out'.

The Gainward is half the cost of alternatives from Creative and M-Audio (the Extigy, Audigy NX and Sonica Theater), but its dynamic range and signal-to-noise ratio – the traditional

measure of sound quality – is nowhere near as impressive of that from the high-priced trio. Along with the Sonica Theater, there's zero support for popular positional gaming effects such as EAX or A3D, but where the Sonica uses SRS CircleSurround to make up the deficit, the MediaXtender

relies on a system tray utility on the host PC to upmix stereo signals. It works, to an extent, but you'll need to hear the results yourself before deciding whether the savings are worth it.

So, while it works brilliantly as a card reader and powered USB hub, it won't find favour with laptop gamers, music fans or

home artists – the very people it's aimed at. Consider that the eight channel, 24-bit/96KHz Audigy NX is just £33 more and the case for the MediaXtender suddenly wears very thin.

That's a shame, because if you're a Shuttle geek with a lot of DVDs and an MPEG collection spanning several hard drives, the Gainward will make honest (if slightly crude) use of your 5.1 speakers and even comes with a copy of WinCinema. But we lied about the teasmaid.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Half the price of rival USB 2.0 products
- ✓ Pain-free installation and operation
- ✗ No support for positional gaming audio
- ✗ Audigy NX a better choice

70

Who is this aimed at?

RADEON 9600XT 128MB

■ Price: £129 | Manufacturer: Hercules | Phone: 0208 6651 881 | europe.hercules.com

Can the Hercules live up to its name?

GRAPHICS CARD

FUNNY how many of the more recent video cards have gotten slower since Christmas. Okay, so I'm making that up. Maybe it's me expecting too much of them; maybe it's me bouncing up and down at the thought of their imminent replacements. Mostly though, it's *Far Cry*. This is without a doubt the most beautiful FPS game I've ever played, and it's also the most intensive.

A look across the benchmarking graphs shows the Hercules 9600XT to be a touch faster than the ASUS equivalent, and a dead ringer for its NVIDIA rival, the Gainward Ultra/960 GS 128MB – aka our Editor's Choice, the FX 5700 Ultra.

All three 'do' *Far Cry* without much trouble, although you'll need a decent-sized processor

as backup to stop complex scenes getting choppy. And if you want to crank up the detail and play the game as the developer intended, you'll need twice the moolah to buy twice the rendering pipelines – the 9600XT is still a far cry (groan) from its big brother, the 9800XT.

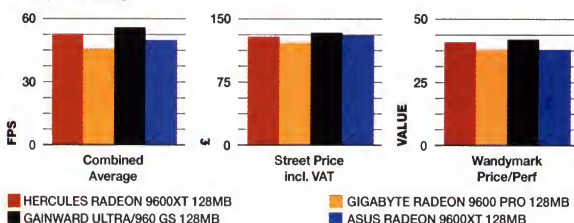
Despite a good showing in synthetic benchmarks, and the fact that there's a *Half-Life 2* coupon inside the box (like a Wonka ticket, I'm beginning to think it's all a work of fiction), the rival NVIDIA card stays ahead in the majority of benchmarks and in combined fps and Wandymark scores. In short then, Gainward gets to

keep its crown.

But wait, let's not write off the Herc just yet. It may trail the 5700 Ultra by a few frames, but it scores highly on price and presentation, or what you might call 'case kudos'. There's heavy use of copper on both sides of the card, and the iridescent blue from the cooling fan is a particularly luscious shade. If you could bottle it and sell it to Citroen Saxo drivers to put in their headlamps, you'd be onto a winner.

Then of course there's the fact that it's an ATI card. The Canadian video people are now ahead of NVIDIA in terms of market share, and in just 12 months they've earned some amazing loyalty. What will make many gamers buy the 9600XT over the 5700 Ultra will be little more than the badge on the front. NVIDIA's new technology had better be good.

BENCHMARKS



The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK** is the combined average score divided by the price.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Price, performance, packaging
- ✓ *Half-Life 2* coupon
- ✗ Current Radeons nearing retirement
- ✗ *Half-Life 2* coupon

80

A gnat's chuff away from the 5700 Ultra



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With Front USB and Firewire
Windows XP Home
Logitech Keyboard
Logitech MX3500 Mouse

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Chieftec Aluminium Matrix Case
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Processor with HT Technology
Intel 875PB Motherboard
512MB PC3200 SDRAM (2 x 256)
Nvidia FX5600 Ultra 128MB Graphics
Serial ATA 120MB HDD
DVD ROM
CDRW
Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS
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Logitech MX3500 Mouse

BUCCANEER

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AREA-51M EXTREME

■ Price: £2,446 + delivery | Manufacturer: Alienware | Phone: 0800 2799 751 | www.alienware.co.uk

The build quality we adore in an improved pint-sized package

I DON'T think I've told you, but I'm president of the League Against Laptops, or plain LAL to members (ie, me). It was formed some years ago to alert the public to the countless annoyances and exasperations of using 'portable computers'. However, given that the horrid things now account for over a quarter of all PCs sold each year – not a small number, I can assure you – the League's mission has not been a wholly successful one. Significantly lower prices, extended battery life, and built-in wireless networking mean that today's machines are far removed from the ancient sub-species that I would once have gladly driven over.

WHO ARE YOU?

Let's put gripes and statistics aside for one moment and take a look at who buys these things. The majority are businesses – salesmen, whose principal use of any computer is the honing of their *Minesweeper* skills – but an increasing number are home users with cash to spare on a second PC. A laptop can now do pretty much everything a desktop machine can do, with the added benefit that you can put it in a bag, sling it in the car and take it with you. Crack the Alienware open and watch a DVD (remote control supplied), burn CDs, listen to music, get on the Net from the growing numbers of 'wireless zones' or play games – whatever you fancy.

Trouble is, games have never been a laptop strongpoint,

"Despite recent advances, portable graphics power is still way off the desktop"

despite the concept being an appealing one (they're far easier to transport than a PlayStation and they have their own telly – the Area-51m sports a 16.1-inch 1600x1200 LCD). Most action titles are demanding affairs which require a muscular video

card plus a three-litre processor before you can start to play them properly, and itsy-bitsy boxes aren't really cut out for this. Size constraints mean that all the things you associate with your favourite shooter, such as big, complex graphics and surround sound, are missing

because the hardware needed to reproduce them simply won't fit into such a small space.

As sales have sharply risen, so laptop manufacturers have set about endowing their machines with a desktop-like prowess. The Area-51m features

ATI's Mobility Radeon 9600, and although the word 'mobility' has the wrong connotations (you expect it to have an orange badge and a ramp with a rail), it's an OK card. Crucially, you can swap the card out yourself by unscrewing a back plate and simply unplugging it – no more sending the thing off to some 'support partner' who'll charge you £250+VAT for the same job.

Although it struggles to keep up in some places, the Mobility Raddy is quite a step forward from the dog-slow notebook graphics of old. Benchmark-wise it most closely resembles a GeForce FX 5600, and in a couple of tests comes within

sight of the Dimension 8300 (see the review opposite). Not bad at all for a little 'un.

In terms of pure grunt, its number-crunching power is identical to that of any 3.2GHz Pentium 4 desktop, as you'd expect, and the same is true of access and read results for its diminutive 7200rpm 60GB hard disk. However, the memory bandwidth on offer is some way short, and together with the Radeon, this contributes to what gamers will dismiss as underwhelming benchmark scores – even if they're much better than I was expecting.

GETTING BETTER

Configure a Dell laptop to an identical specification and the two machines will be within a few quid of one another – once

again, Web gossip that condemns Alienware as 'silly money' compared to rivals is false. I've said it before and I'll say it again: as an off-the-shelf package for gamers, Alienware products are good value and give lasting pleasure from unrivalled kudos, bomb-proof construction and a fresh design.

GOOD TOP, BAD TOP

The only real gripe about the Area-51m Extreme is that it's a laptop. While that sounds silly, the truth is that, despite recent advances, portable graphics power remains way off the desktop. There are many considerations to take into account: first, the battery, which runs dry after an hour's play; second, the cramped keyboard, which is almost impossible to use in frenzied arcade games. But if you have a wireless access point in your home, and you want to play

Counter-Strike in the bedroom, or watch DVDs in your shed (check!), the little Alienware is one of the nicest products of its type and should definitely be on your shopping list. The 2.8GHz version starts at £1,700, so it'd be daft not to. **[A-]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ The best-looking laptop in the world
- ✓ Everything you expect from Alienware
- ✗ Still only average gaming power
- ✗ Very heavy, plus large fan-cooled PSU

81

If you're going to buy a gaming notebook, buy this one

DIMENSION 8300 3.2GHZ

■ Price: £1,710 + delivery | Manufacturer: Dell | Phone: 0870 1524 649 | www.dell.co.uk

Cool and coordinated, but can the Dell cut it as a gaming box?

DESKTOP PC

AFTER years of driving around in BMWs, my father suddenly got excited about Volvos. Immediately following his retirement, he bought a flat cap followed by a bird table, some gardening books, a bread-making machine and then spent a lot of time researching flour, Volvos and Dell PCs. Aunt Marion had bought a Dell and loved it, the guy up the road bought a Volvo estate and loved it and somehow the old man figured he needed both. Like the car, the Dell would be a mark of sound judgment; it was for sensible people who did sensible things. Or in the case of this particular model, not.

CRAZY-MAD!

Before we look under the bonnet, appreciate how ruggedly handsome the 8300 is. I know it looks like every other Dell you've ever seen, but if (like me) you spend your time looking through a Frankenstein's monster of diverse components, being loaned a PC where the chunky black keyboard matches the screen, the chunky black screen matches the case and the chunky black case matches the mouse is always an experience to savour.

The 'new computer niff' of silica gel lingers long after you've heaved the thing onto your desk – that alone is guaranteed to set any electronics fan's heart a-racing. The warranty details make you go "aahh", and the email and telephone support, plus a free copy of Norton Anti-Virus, give you the sense that you're being well looked after.

IN THE ENGINE ROOM

The Dimension 8300 features a 3.2GHz P4 800FSB (Intel 875P chipset), 512MB DDR400 RAM (upgradeable to 2GB), Creative Audigy 2, a Radeon 9800XT 256MB and two 36GB drives in RAID-0 configuration. You also

get a 4x DVD+R/+RW drive, a fetching 19-inch Dell Ultrasharp flatscreen (more about this later), plus Altec Lansing 4.1 speakers.

Dell markets the machine to people who "demand performance, intense multimedia

benchmarks (3DMark2001, 3DMark03, *Final Fantasy* and *Aquamark3*), but lags some way behind real world scores from *Comanche 4*, *X2* and *UT2003*.

In subjective tests, where

afterglow which lessened everyone's eyeball stamina.

It turns out that the unit's response time is 25ms – definitely borderline for action titles. Also on a downer, it was

will appeal if you just want to use the machine rather than understand it. Plus, whoever designed the keyboard deserves a medal – it's without doubt the nicest product of its type I've ever used.

And don't forget the price – very good for such a specification – plus the fact you get a substantial flatscreen monitor thrown in. If it's within your budget, and you're not worried about having the bang-up hippest machine in town, this Dell has everything else you need to simply plug it into a socket and get gaming. **PCZ**

"Dell kit exudes an indefinable quality and its attention to detail improves with every launch"

capabilities and expandability", but it'd say that about a £45 inkjet printer. It's the marketing department's job to make everything look appealing, and my job to see if they're right. So let's see how it behaves.

My investigations show that the Dimension runs the more expensive Alienware Extreme P4EE close in synthetic

friends, relatives and colleagues were asked to play a wide variety of titles, including *Far Cry*, *Desert Combat* and *C&C: Generals*, it became clear that while the machine was up to the task, the 19-inch screen had issues. Although easy on the eyes at the desktop and in slower-paced RTS games, *Desert Combat* and its ilk suffered slight

noted that the Dimension's *BF1942* load times, a fair indication of a machine's all-round oomph, were almost identical to that of my 533FSB 3.06GHz test machine. There was also a peculiar (and annoying) buzzing noise from the rear of the machine that was eventually attributed to the Radeon 9800XT's fan.

DELLY GOOD

Screen niggles and fan noises aside, the Dell is an altogether convincing product. The hinged case, which jaws open to allow easy access to all the components, makes upgrading a doddle (even though there isn't much you'd want to upgrade).

Its colour-coded connections

DELL DELIVERS

Dell now makes \$35bn a year, and if you were worried that buying mass-produced stuff might be a bad move, an awful lot of people – from Volvo owners with bread-making machines to large corporations with thousands of employees – would be making a bad move with you. While four-gig, liquid-cooled overclockers and cold cathode case freaks will scoff and make jokes about using daddy's computer, ignore them. They may be right, but they're missing the point here.

Getting simple things right is why Dell has so many repeat buys from their customers; as with the Alienware, its kit exudes an indefinable quality, and attention to detail improves with every model launch. Let's face it, you don't achieve over 15 per cent global market share through the pursuit of mediocrity.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Coordinated, low-key styling
- ✓ Solid, fast, all-inclusive package
- ✗ 25ms flatscreen not up to gaming
- ✗ Drive-you-mental fan noise from the Raddy

86

Sensible as ever, but with a decidedly mad streak



DEAR WANDY

Once again, it's time for Wandy to rescue the universe with his patented curly wig, his sonic screwdriver and bag of Jelly Babies. Sounds delicious...

■ ENEMY OF THE DALEKS Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing.

If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallingington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

MEMORY MASSIVE

Q I have a Dell Dimension 2400 Pentium 4 2.4 GHz, NVIDIA GeForce FX5200, 256MB DDR RAM and Windows XP Home Edition. I recently bought an ATI Radeon 9600 Pro 256MB to replace the GeForce. Thing is, I've been noticing games such as *Republic* need a minimum 512MB RAM to run. Should I upgrade to 512MB by adding another 256MB stick, or replace my 256MB with a 512MB? I'm also thinking of buying a Creative MegaWorks THX 5.1 550. I have a Creative Sound Blaster Live! 5.1 sound card, and I was wondering if I can connect the MegaWorks speakers to my DVD player and GameCube as well? I'd appreciate any suggestions.

Sean Deverell

with one of identical specifications. Translated into English, what you're after is a single 256MB PC2700 memory module, preferably one from a reputable manufacturer.

If you happened to be thinking of junking your pooter for the next model up within the next six months, it would be wise to buy one or two PC3200 modules instead as you can then transplant them, along with the 9600 Pro, from old to new hardware.

Your second question refers to the Creative MegaWorks speakers. In all honesty, you shouldn't expect too much from this set in terms of the 'home cinema' experience. First and foremost, they're desktop computer speakers, albeit posh and expensive ones – and with a lack of digital input, you're not going to get six-channel surround-sound from an external DVD player. For that you need an internal DVD drive with outputs routed through your 5.1 soundcard.

You should also be aware that you won't be able to hook up your GameCube at the same time, and will have to muck about under your desk unplugging and plugging whenever you fancy a change. That's less than graceful, I'm sure you'll agree. Your best bet is to buy a cheap audio switch – or, better still, a compact Behringer or Soundcraft mixer – and pipe the output into the MegaWorks' auxiliary input.

IMPOSSIBLY FAST?

Q I've been thinking about getting a new system for a while now. You might think I'm being lazy by asking you to do my research for me, but the truth is the more I look at motherboard and RAM and everything else, the more I get stuck. I was going to get a motherboard with DDR400, but as I was searching for some



If the fastest system bus clocks along at 200MHz, what's the benefit of DDR533 RAM?

good memory hardware to go with it, I noticed that you can get DDR533. When I search for a motherboard that supports this, I can't find it anywhere. I can spend about £1,200 on a new system, and would like to keep my 5.1 soundcard and GeForce4 Ti4400 – or should I get a better one?

I want to build a monster and I'd like to be able to overclock it. Is there any way you can help me here, because I don't want to waste my money on buying incompatible components?

Silv

A The DDR533 memory modules are strictly for overclockers. As you aim to join the club, this isn't a problem – but be warned that membership can be a rather expensive affair. Where a 'regular' DDR400 chip (ie dual x 200MHz) is suited to an 800MHz frontside bus (ie quad x 200MHz) motherboard, a DDR533 chip is designed to work where the FSB has been tweaked upwards from 200MHz closer to 300MHz.

Take the Intel 2.4GHz chip from Sean Deverell's letter 'Memory Massive', left. On the right motherboard, with the right BIOS settings and PC4200 memory, you could squeeze 250MHz from the bus and add 25 per cent to its vanilla benchmarking scores – 3.0GHz from a processor that costs less than most games.

Now, if you've been reading this column for as long as I've

been writing it, you'll know I'm not the biggest fan of mucking about with clock speeds. In the same way that I've gone from lashing about in sports cars to gliding around in big automatics, stability comes before speed – your PC should be reliable, first and foremost.

However, now that companies are manufacturing products that successfully meet the silly demands of overclockers, my stance has weakened somewhat. So if you want to 'up' the clock speed of your system clock, and nowadays there are fewer reasons not to do so, get yourself an Intel-based board such as the MSI 875P Neo-FIS2 (£100), any 3.0GHz or higher Prescott (say, £250), a pair of Corsair 512MB XMS4000 Pro TwinX memory modules (£220) and you'll be well on your way.

Make sure you look around the web for overclocking guides before you go mucking about with CAS timings and voltages, or you'll end up locking yourself out of your machine. For the moment, hang on to your graphics card – the end of March should see some exciting new video hardware appear from both ATI and NVIDIA.

AOL RUMOUR MILL

Q After reading Matthew Gilroy's letter in issue 138 about his online gaming woes, I realised that he'd failed to mention which ISP he was using.



Creative's MegaWorks set is great for desktop gaming, but don't expect the pro audio experience.

A As you mentioned that your Dell had an FX5200 card before you quite wisely replaced it with a 9600 Pro, I'm guessing it's less than a year old. I'll assume that you have no plans to replace the system just yet – it's quite important to know as it can determine which upgrade path you take. The later Dimension 2400 machines feature a 533MHz FSB, and so you'll want to pair your existing DDR333 chip

"The more I look at motherboard and RAM and everything else, the more I seem to get stuck"

"Look in forums and on newsgroups and you'll that find everyone, from casual players to EverQuest freaks, has AOL email accounts"

The reason I'm writing is because I'm using AOL and have the same problems, but only on certain games. *Battlefield 1942*, *Call Of Duty* and *Castle Wolfenstein ET* refuse to work with my ADSL connection, whereas *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and *America's Army* work fine.

On contacting the makers of *BF1942*, I was told the game was "incompatible" with AOL and that I should contact my ISP about it. After contacting AOL, it told me that the problem exists because AOL connects you to the Internet through its own proprietary network system, and so you don't get a 'true' connection. I said I didn't have a clue what all this was about, and all I want to do is play games, but AOL hung up. Therefore, I'm considering changing my ISP as I find AOL to be very unhelpful and totally gamer-unfriendly.

Neil Harvey

A AOL will never be accepted as a 'real' ISP because, somewhat perversely, the company's service is aimed at real people. A large proportion of the UK operation's two million subscribers are mums and dads, older folk with a PC under a dust sheet in the spare bedroom and ordinary users whose interest in games is limited to a quick burst of *The Sims* on a Sunday night. These people are not net-savvy and are rightly



You can't beat the shape of a Logitech pilot, and I've never had one go wrong on me.

comforted by the contents of the AOL CD: virus protection, a firewall, spam blocking and so on and so forth.

Now, I realise that speaking highly of AOL is like dropping puppies out of high windows, so I'd better explain the lecture. Quite simply, the rumours are false. AOL do not block games, and if you decide to sidestep the bundled software, its broadband service is much the same as that provided by any other ISP.

Imagine for a moment how many calls its helpdesk would receive if it blocked random games! Look in forums and on newsgroups and you'll find everyone, from casual players to clan leaders and *EverQuest* freaks, has AOL email accounts. Sure, so some of these people are idiots, but for every AOL cretin you run into, I can find you ten more morons from other ISPs.

To cut a long story short, if you're having issues with games, it's most likely to be a modem or hardware problem, your own firewall blocking you, or the fact that you haven't patched to the latest version.

NEOCHRONIC

Q Two days ago I left XP on standby overnight. On loading *Neocron* in the morning, the mouse-pointer on the menu screen moved erratically – and inside the game my ping shot up to 200 and my frame-rate dived

below five. Asking on the community boards, they suggested I'd probably picked something up, so I ran every virus checker I had. I also used Ad-Aware 6.0 and double-checked ZoneAlarm, with no joy.

So next, I reformatted that night. I reinstalled freshly downloaded Detonator drivers, reinstalled DirectX9.0, reinstalled Freeserve DSL, reinstalled *Neocron* – and guess what? It still runs as if I'm using a Pentium 133 with no memory (it's actually a P4 1.8MHz with 256MB RAM and a PNY GeForce4 Ti4600). Additionally, XP's desktop menus are extremely slow, as if I have no graphics card. This is baffling me and the rest of the *Neocron* community. Please help!

Lewis Burnell

A Sounds like a hardware problem of some description, with the prime suspects being the mouse followed by the video card. You don't mention if you experience these same symptoms in any of the other games you play, so I'd first try benchmarking your machine either with a system information tool such as AIDA32, or by running one of the 3DMark variants.

If they perform as you'd expect – and this is an example of why you should regularly 'chart' your machine with benchmarks – then I'd try to find a different mouse. You

FAST, EFFECTIVE PAIN RELIEF

RAPID REMEDIES FROM DR PHIL

Q I have an Athlon 2.2GHz with a 60GB hard drive, 512MB RAM and a 9600 Pro. I'm looking to upgrade to an Athlon 3200, MSI 865PE NEO-2, 1GB RAM and either a 9800XT 256MB or a GeForce FX 5950 Ultra. Should I buy these individually and put them in my old case, or order a PC with these parts installed?

Mike Smith

A It's quite easy to assemble your own PC these days from separate components. If you're not daunted by the prospect of plugging it all together, go for it. That said, modern PC manufacturers work to tiny margins, and it's worth calculating the difference in cost. A pre-built machine with a warranty might be preferable.

Q I recently bought a new PC, then two Western Digital SATA drives. I booted up using the XP CD and hit F6, but only had the option to install to the IDE drive. I can't seem to even tell if the SATA drive is on. Additionally, when booting up, I get the message along the lines of 'Promise Fast Track Controller BIOS Not Installed?' Can you help?

Jason Shortland

A If you're adding SATA to an existing install, connect it and start Windows. When the 'Found New Hardware' box appears, insert the driver disk and you're away. If installing from scratch, you're going about it the right way. I'd suggest the drivers you're using are out of date. Visit the manufacturer's website and download the most recent set or it won't be recognised. This very situation caught me out on my last SATA install. With regard to the error, it may be that your RAID is listed as one of the startup devices in your BIOS. Remove it.

Q I just upgraded to an Asus P4P800 Deluxe with paired 512MB RAM. I have a GeForce4 Ti4400 and am running XP. When I play 3D games, my machine shuts down and I have to cycle the power before I can reboot. But if I play Windows-based games, it's fine.

Garry Sprusen

A Try running a copy of MEMTEST86 overnight. If it fails, try upping the voltage to your memory or swapping it out. Ensure your PSU is a minimum of 350W. Reinstall the latest Detonator drivers from the NVIDIA website. Make sure you run Asus utilities to keep an eye on your board temperature, and ensure that your video card's fan is spinning – the Ti4400 is probably getting on a bit.

Q Every time I go to run *Halo*, I get the following error: "Your computer's video driver was not tested with this game. A newer version that is compatible may be available. If you wish to update your drivers, please contact your computer manufacturer for any necessary help." I have a Radeon 9700 Pro. I thought the problem was with the driver, so I downloaded CATALYST 4.1. This hasn't helped – any suggestions?

Ben Richards

A You did the right thing. But if you look at the Microsoft website, you'll see that the 9700 Pro isn't among the supported video cards. It's my opinion that *Halo* ain't all that, and I'm not surprised the newsgroups are full of people asking the same questions. Fewer and fewer people are playing it online. You'd be wise to play something else.

don't say which model you have, but early optical rodents exhibited some curious behaviour, normally just before they stopped working altogether. I'd also try testing your machine with an old-fashioned PS/2 device with a ball. Failing that, another avenue to explore is your

modem. If it's a USB device, you might want to try changing it for a router. USB modems are notoriously grumpy things and are also open to exploitation in ways that DSL routers are not. ☞

Visit Wendy on the web at www.dearwendy.com



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EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading "Watchdog"

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If you're writing in to complain about a product, please let us know your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

THE GREAT PC WORLD CON?

David Dickinson would be proud of reader Jon Feaver. He's a bargain hunter who spotted an ad for PC World's Boxing Day sale. On offer was a GeForce FX 5900 video card reduced from nearly £200 to £95 – but for Boxing Day only.

"So a friend of mine went to PC World in London and I went to PC World in Northampton," Jon explains. "I was second in line when the shop opened at 9am and my friend was first in line at the shop in London. When we both got into the shop, we were told by some very offhand sales staff that the cards were sold out long before Christmas. Other people in the line queuing for other things such as a scanner and video camera were also told the same thing."

Jon reckons that the sale was just a way to get people into the store on Boxing

"If Jon is right, it means there must be a whole lot of unobservant people working at PC World in Northampton"

Day: "I'd like to know how PC World can get away with this? I wasn't the only one there, and nearly everything that was meant to be a 'big bargain' that day was sold out! In short, the whole 'sale' was actually just one big con!"

PC World? Conning people? Can this be true? Not according to PC World: "After investigating, we've found that stocks were available – in varying quantities – in all PC World branches across the UK," a spokesperson for the company claims. "I also looked into the advertised camera and scanner nominations, which were in equally good supply."

The company apologises for the inadequate service and the misleading information given to you by a member of staff at the store. PC World says it strives to deliver the highest level of customer service at all times and can only explain what happened as a mistake on behalf of the sales advisor concerned.

"In many instances (with our smaller boxed products), a sample box will be displayed and a customer takes this to an advisor to be swapped for a complete product," puffs PC World. "The shelf may have been empty and the sales advisor did not check the stockroom."

Well, if Jon's claims about there being plenty of frustrated customers in



Reader Jon Feaver was glad he turned up to PC World's Boxing Day sale early...

THE ACCUSED



**GUILTY UNTIL
PROVEN INNOCENT**

DOG

a similar position to him on Boxing Day are right, that means there must be an awful lot of slack and unobservant people working at PC World in Northampton...

"I'VE BEEN AD!"

Meanwhile, it's over to Dell, whose offer looked so great in the newspaper that reader Gurkan Haksever went and bought its 4600 package. Gurkan describes it as "a really good package, with a 17-inch flat panel monitor, a 3.06GHz processor and all the trimmings for just over £1,000. Hell, Dell even chucked in a free printer/scanner," he exclaims. "I was well chuffed – at least, until it arrived."

Ah. You see, according to Gurkan, the picture in the ad showed a computer with two drives, but his PC only arrived with one. "I phoned Dell the next day and it said that I'd got what I'd ordered. Apparently, the picture in the ad was 'irrelevant'."

Gurkan was adamant, though: "I emailed Dell's online customer services department," he says. "Amazingly, I got a positive reply from Dell saying that it would send me a plug-in CD-ROM drive as a gesture of goodwill. However, I still haven't received anything!"

So, off to Dell Watchdog ran: "Mr Haksever ordered a Dell Dimension 4600 promotional package that had appeared in the national press," it explained. "The promotion on offer from Dell came with various options the customer could select from, which included selecting a CD-ROM drive, a Lexmark printer or £75. Mr. Haksever selected to receive £75 off and a printer/scanner, which meant he would not receive a CD-ROM drive as well."

Dell says it has since been in touch with you, Gurkan, to apologise for any confusion caused regarding the delays you experienced in resolving this issue. "We have now reached a resolution which we believe is to the satisfaction of the customer," it concludes.

Hopefully, this means you have the CD-ROM drive you wanted, Gurkan. In the meantime, Watchdog has said it before and will say it again – always get your system's full specs in writing from the company before parting with your cash. That way, if something is out of place it'll save time, confusion and long, drawn-out arguments...

DIABOLICAL DEMONS

You've taken the plunge and bravely quashed any niggling doubts about how much you're spending on that new kick-ass PC. There's nothing more to do than sit back and wait for that big bundle of joy to touch down on your doorstep.



Reader Dave Spence was starting to worry if he'd need this by the time his Demonite PC turned up...

Unless you happened to order it from Demonite, that is. "I ordered my PC via the Demonite website on October 27, expecting it to arrive within the 10-14 working days as advertised by the company," Dave Spence recalls. "As the billing address was different from the delivery address, my father (who was paying for the PC) soon received a phone call to authorise the purchase."

With a proof of address sent out the same day, Dave (and his dad) had heard nothing back by November 13, so Dave dropped Demonite a line. The company informed him that the PC would be delivered by November 19 at the very latest. No question. Nearly.

"However, the PC did not arrive," says Dave. "So I called again on November 24. I was told that the PC had been delivered and that there was proof of delivery. I informed them that the PC had most definitely not been delivered and Demonite said it'd look into the matter."

The next day, Demonite rang to say that the PC had in fact been lost in transit, and that a replacement would touch down on November 27. Well, December 2 as it turns out. To the wrong address.

Never mind – once it was finally delivered to him, Dave then discovered that the PC didn't work: "I immediately rang the customer support line and was told that I'd receive a phone call to confirm a date for a technician to call round," fumes Dave. And guess what? "I haven't heard anything back from the customer sales team about this since!"

Over to Demonite. The company says that once the security issue with the credit card was resolved on November 10, the order was processed and shipped on November 27. "This was what we had initially quoted as the timescale – 10-14 working days from verification of order."

Er, what about the 'lost in transit' line, then? Never mind, eh? Let's get on to the faulty machine...

"We will contact the customer and look into where his emails have been routed and ensure that support is given. Demonite prides itself on its support, but appreciates something must have broken down in communication on this occasion."

So by the time you read this Dave, you and your new PC should be nicely tucked up together and all should have been sorted. Please let us know if this is not the case. Until next month, keep those issues coming!

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BUYER'S GUIDE

We've got the knowledge, you've got the cash, let's spend lots of money...

Gone are the three categories of old, and in their place are three new ones. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy all of you, no matter what

you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a very worthy alternative. Finally, the Also

Consider product is one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your dipple. If you feel we've got something wrong, or

just want to add your tuppence ha'penny, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we'll be certain to shower you with gifts. Promise.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARD



IC7
STREET PRICE £88
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Another solid and modern ABIT board with dual-channel memory configuration, two channel SATA with RAID, USB 2.0, 800FSB, plus 6-channel audio with S/PDIF. All cables included and it's overclocker-friendly, with a host of tweaking options in the BIOS. If you want high-speed networking, the IC7-G variant includes Intel Gigabit LAN on-board. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.

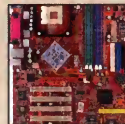
NEW ENTRY



K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)
STREET PRICE £75.50
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

With the nForce2 chipset and the FSB wound up to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards like the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.

WAS £87
NOW £75

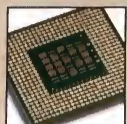


875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)
STREET PRICE £116
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and packaging are excellent.

WAS £119
NOW £116

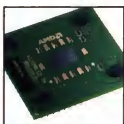
PROCESSOR



P4 3.2GHZ
STREET PRICE £220
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

With the price of the 3.0GHz now well below £200, it makes sense to spend a bit extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory makes its presence felt. If you've got a P4 motherboard, chances are you're already set for an upgrade to remember.

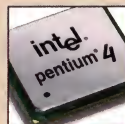
NEW ENTRY



ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB
STREET PRICE £145
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

No, it's not as punchy as the hyper-threaded Pentium – but it's got a great price tag. Earlier 333FSB chips can be had for around the £100 mark, but with an nForce2 or better chipset and DDR400 memory, you can enjoy the speed boost from more recent XP chips. If you want to build a low-cost, high-power PC, get a cooking video card and the AMD chip will do you proud.

NEW ENTRY



P4 2.6GHZ
STREET PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

We'd previously recommended Intel's 2.4GHz 800FSB chip, but recent price slicing means the 2.6GHz chip now makes most sense. Coupled with a decent motherboard, some top-class memory and an FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, you'll have a machine that's muscular enough to tackle all the latest games. If you're building a home games network and want big machines for hardly any money, look no further.

NEW ENTRY

HDD



WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £67.50
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

Many of you will view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB
STREET PRICE £54.50
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.

WAS £57
NOW £54



RAPTOR 36GB
STREET PRICE £92.50
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

WAS £96
NOW £92

GRAPHICS CARD



ULTRA/960 GOLDEN SAMPLE 128MB
STREET PRICE £145
MANUFACTURER Gainward
TELEPHONE 01635 524949
WEBSITE www.gainward.co.uk

Who'd have thought that we'd see an NVIDIA card winning the value battle after ATI's domination of the past two years? The Golden Sample is faster than the Radeon and level pegs the 9600XT in all the benchmarks. Crucially, in terms of bangs for your buck, the 5700 Ultra wins – it's ATI's turn to play catch-up.



128MB RADEON 9600 PRO
STREET PRICE £111
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

The 9600 Pro ties for value with the 5700 Ultra. For less than half the cost of a big-ass Raddy, the 128MB card packs an amazing punch that knocks most rivals for six. Gigabyte's bundle includes three top games, plus PowerDVD 5 and all the necessary cable whips. Only the arrival of Gainward's faster Ultra/960 Golden Sample prevents the Gigabyte card from holding on to top slot.



256MB V9950 ULTRA
STREET PRICE £288
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 00 886 2 2890 7121
WEBSITE www.asus.com

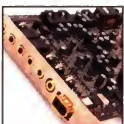
The FX 5900 Ultra finds its feet again with the release of the series 50 Detonator drivers – top class Radeons will find themselves level-pegging with the big GeForce. The one thing preventing this and other über-cards from taking top slot is their alarming value – you don't get many frames per pound spent. But if you're after the hardware for top resolution, top quality gaming, this is it.

SOUNDCARD



REVOLUTION 7.1
STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 717 7100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



AUDIGY 2
STREET PRICE £85
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX
STREET PRICE £167
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Ex is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 Firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



World's Most Powerful VGA ever...

Worldwide No.1 VGA Card Manufacturer

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX500
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been bogged by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



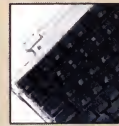
INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



INTERNET KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARD



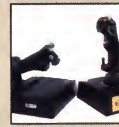
CYBORG EVO
STREET PRICE £26
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £23
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICK



INSPIRE P580 5.1
STREET PRICE £65
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. This latest design includes a headphone jack at last.



Z-640
STREET PRICE £70
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
STREET PRICE £189
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £230
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place – things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £490
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24 mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a truly breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also features a typically comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and is ideal partner for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE IPOD 40GB
STREET PRICE £400
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod – and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch too. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
STREET PRICE £316
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO
STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYER

FX5700



MAILBOX

Why don't you send us a letter, the sooner the better?

■ BIG EARS, BIG HEART Dave Woods



TWO TRIBES

I've read your mag for some three years now and have never felt the need to write in – but then I read your comments about *Tribes 2* in issue 136.

I've played this game since it was released and can't leave it alone. It's got team-play, goals and requires skill, plus you can take on an immense number of roles during the game. The learning curve might be steep, but it's ultimately rewarding – and unlike other online games, regulars are always willing to teach newcomers the ropes.

As for most servers being on the other side of the pond, there are a fair few in the UK and there are lots of European servers with



Tribes 2 has more than its fair share of fanatical fans.

good ping times too. More importantly, the community is still huge – check out tribes2.theladder.org/. Plus, there's a UK LAN party in Stoke-On-Trent in April that's free for spectators – what better way to see the game being played the way it was meant to be?

It would be nice for someone from your mag to play the game intensely, get the latest maps, join a team and see what *Tribes 2* is really all about. I'm sure your view would be different if you only gave the game the chance it deserves.

Simon aka The Gooner

Over to Wandy, our *Tribes* chief: "I think we've done *Tribes* proud over the years. We cottoned on to the originality of the first instalment before any other magazine and we praised the follow-up with a jumbo score.

I covered most of what you said in my review, but your attachment to the game has made you a little blind to its faults. Sure, it's still satisfying, but it's showing its age and we're not about to recommend it over newer, better titles."

ERECTION

I'm writing in to thank Suzy for her great column last month and, of course, those gorgeous demos – especially the exclusive *X2: The Threat*. I look forward to testing out the latest

technological advancements in computer graphic engines: as games get more advanced, the experience becomes all the more fantastic.

It's nice to see a pretty face for a change instead of all those blokes. I wish more women were interested in the gaming industry, as it's a great hobby. Keep up the good work and look forward to the next issue.

Dave Owen

'Testing out the latest technological advancements in computer graphic engines?' You need to work on your chat-up lines.



Suzy likes nothing more than providing you with the latest technological advancements.

AMERICA'S BARMY

In your recent feature on controversial games you say the following about *America's Army*. "Games as propaganda? It certainly raised a few eyebrows, but we doubt that very few people would be stupid enough to play the game and sign up –

well, very few people outside of the US anyway."

I think you should consider revising your research. Since its release, the game has been updated no fewer than ten times, with the latest release, v2.0, adding Special Forces roles to the mix. The game currently has over 2.8 million registered users and is played just as much abroad as in the United States. Our team alone is composed of over 30 members from over 12 countries, including Canada, Australia, Russia and Hong Kong. We also have an active service member of the 45th Infantry.

The draw is the authenticity of the team-based dynamic, the realism of the game's structure and the lack of bunny-hopping ten-year-olds. The honour system provides the incentive to keep playing and the global community is mature, and in a lot of cases, active or veteran servicemen and women from around the world.

And the best thing? It's free! So what is this pathetic hang-up that the UK media have over *America's Army*? The war's over now, isn't it time to put away the moral stick?

[SPZ]-bigAPE-[B]

America's Army was developed as a recruiting tool for the real-life American army and that's why it was included in the feature on controversial games. We're not saying the game's bad, mature, immature, brilliant or stupid – just controversial. And I still reckon you'd have to be pretty stupid to apply to join the US army if you weren't a US citizen, by the way.

WANDAGE

Today, I spent nearly four hours searching for a replacement video card for my ageing GeForce3 Ti 200 on the Web. Search I did, high, low, through thick marketing bull and thin technical specs, but to no avail.

Enter issue 139 of *PC ZONE*. Flip to 'Dear Wandy' and lo and behold, there's someone with



America's Army: played the world over.

SOUND OFF & WIN A SOUNDCARD. LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT? WRITE IN THEN!

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 9 DALLINGTON ST, LONDON EC1V 0BQ, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

WIN!
A TOP
SOUND
CARD

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new soundcard, courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Audigy 2 Platinum has been firmly ensconced in our Buyer's Guide since its release, and is one of the best cards you can currently buy.



"I'm now one of the big boys and play it for over five hours a day. My eyes are buggered and my friends ran away months ago"

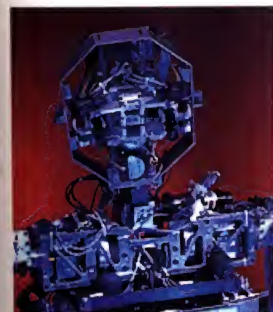
ROSS MURISON LAMENTS HIS INTRODUCTION TO NATIONSTATES

the exact same question (spooky!) – what to buy as a replacement card.

After seeing the 5700 Ultra recommended, flicky flicky flick to the Buyer's Guide and there's a 5700 Ultra by Gainward. After doing some checking on the Gainward site I've found I can run the newer cards. To my immense relief. Time and again I have used you as a reliable source and you have yet to let me down. Thank you.

Michael Harris.

With your praise you've bought a tear to the eye of Dr Wandy. And being constructed entirely of chips and binary code, that's no mean feat.



Wandy: whir, whir, beep...

GTA: HIT CITY

I'm a big fan of the *Hitman* series, but when will they make an open-ended version? You know, pick what missions you want to do, assassinate that person, dodge the cops, get back home, grab your cash and buy more weapons for your stock. I think it'd make a quality game that I wouldn't be able to put down. Or is that just the psychopath in me coming out?

Jason Hanscomb

Pick a mission, assassinate someone, dodge the cops, get home, grab your cash and buy more weapons? You've just described *GTA 3* or *Vice City*. *Hitman* does things differently – surely that's no bad thing?

FREE HIT

This is an email with a single purpose. I want to wish you an

early death for introducing me to *NationStates*, which was in your free online games column a couple of issues ago. I created a simple nation believing it would be something I logged in to once a week. But that was before I discovered the forums and got completely hooked.

I'm now one of the big boys and play it for over five hours a day. My eyes are buggered and my friends ran away months ago. Any new people wishing to join, my name is Freedom Country, but I advise you not to. And thanks *PC ZONE*, you've ruined my life.

Ross Murison

As ever, it's our pleasure. By the way, have you tried *Globulous* (www.globulous.com) yet? Don't be scared...

SOIXANTE NEUF

I've been subscribing to your mag since 1999 and thought it about time I wrote to say thanks for all the good stuff, especially the spot-on reviews. I tend to buy just a few selected titles that make it to the top of your A-lists and/or Classic status, as I only play computer games in the winter evenings (summer's for real outdoor games). I haven't been disappointed so far. I've just completed the really excellent *Call Of Duty* (great to know no cows were hurt) and am about to start *Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne*.

After your iffy review of *Deus Ex 2* I cancelled my pre-order and having now played the demo, I suspect you were over generous even with faint praise – it was very disappointing indeed.

By the way, I guess I must be one of your oldest readers at 69 years young. It would be interesting to know if there are many other OAPs that indulge. How about asking your readers to write in and confess? Or would it turn your younger readers off to know that wrinkles do it too?

Ray S-B

Well? Is Ray our oldest reader? Or is he a mere pup compared

LETTER OF THE MONTH

ODE TO ZONE

Woods is boss, but he's still a laugh, Even though he's gone mad with power. Holden looks like a psychopath, And Steve Hill's a cauliflower.

Korda is a hefty chap, He's like the Hulk on steroids. Sefton's mad 'cause Leeds are crap, And Steve Hill's head's a cuboid.

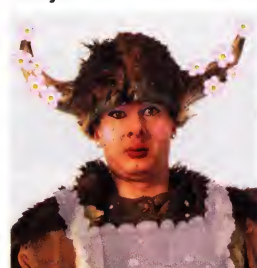
Prezzer likes planes and sailing things, And he's got ginger hair Porter protects us with his wings, And Hill should be put in care.

Poor old Suzy has no legs, And she always wears a hat. Woods is supping up all the dregs, And Steve Hill's getting fat.

O'Hagan's always extra cheery, Because he thinks he's bloody brilliant. Porter's drunk, but a good boy really, And Hill's a sexual deviant.

Dave Sutton

Thanks for that very amusing verse, You must have toiled hard. So put away your barren purse, And accept a free soundcard. Sorry.



Steve Hill: a sexual deviant? Surely not...

BACKCHAT

THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PC ZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

Many a topic fired the imaginations of your fettered minds this month, but one thread stood out from the others. 'PC ZONE down the pan?' That sir, is a challenge – and one that we won't back down from.

Initiated by a young upstart named **Don_15**, it kicked off with some uncommonly harsh words. "Let's face it, *PC ZONE* isn't what it used to be." Come on, don't hold back. "For example in the *Hidden & Dangerous 2* review, you talk about how hard the tanks are to destroy. I came across roughly two tanks that were actually a threat to me, and they were incredibly simple to beat." Erm, OK. Anything else? "Denying games a 100 per cent score is another quibble I have with the magazine. Oh, and whatever happened to the Supertest?"

Forget about the name, **Dunny_Vin** came up with a very succinct reply. "I reckon it's still the best PC mag available. As for not giving 100 per cent scores, surely that could only be for a game that's absolutely perfect in every way – and I don't think there's ever been a game like that, probably never will be." Quite. And anyway **Don_15**, what are you doing wasting people's time with topics of this magnitude? What about busy people like **Feelec**? "I'd like to do a point-by-point reply to your post, but don't have the time. IMO, most of your complaints are either unwarranted or trivial."

So what else do we do wrong? **Son_Jason00** has been collecting "PC ZONE for about three or four years and it's always been my favourite magazine, but recently a lot of the bad language has been taken out." Oh, for f****'s sake... Will? "I used the f-word liberally in the controversial games feature – hope that made you happy." Well said. And if a nice boy like Will can swear, there's hope for the rest of us.

We could sense the tide of battle swaying in our favour, and that was before **IvoryOutlaw78** made his views known. "Face it, the only other options would be *PC G****** (which sucks badly and is aimed at pre-puberty brats) and *PC F****** (which is a lot worse now than it used to be and needs pin-up girls on the cover to attract readers. It's *PC ZONE* or nothing, I'm afraid."

No need to be afraid, **Ivory**. Oh yeah, and the Supertest is returning next issue. Don't say we don't listen...



Postal 2 was fairly f**king controversial.

to you? Write or email us at the usual address and send us a recent photograph to prove your vintage.

GO, GO, GO...

Ever since I heard of a single-player version of *Counter-Strike*, I was, like many others, very excited about its release. Now I'm just getting annoyed, as it suffers delay after delay after delay. You reviewed it about 12 months ago, but it still hasn't come out. I asked for it two years ago for my birthday, but

still no release – so please can you tell me when the game is likely to hit the shelves in the UK?

Mark Foley aka Capt Paddy

Calm yourself.

After our review, the game went back into development, but you'll be pleased to know that *C-S: Condition Zero* is now ready and slightly better than it was – see our review on page 80. [W]



THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

CALL OF DUTY



Quite simply the greatest shooter currently on the market, *Call Of Duty* is like the tour-de-force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Never before has war felt so real, the player felt so helpless and comrades felt so human. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear, excitement and exhilaration within you, there is no greater WWII experience than this.

PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE: 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy

PCZ ISSUE: 136

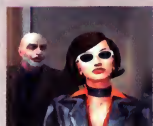


MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

It may have been toppled by *Call Of Duty*, but *Allied Assault's* set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.

PUB EA **DEV** 2015

PCZ ISSUE: 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith

PCZ ISSUE: 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE: 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles, plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE: 138



UNREAL II

In terms of visuals, this is the absolute pinnacle in the world of the FPS. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice acting all exude quality too.

PUB EA **DEV** Legend Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE: 126



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion

PCZ ISSUE: 119



JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

The latest saber 'em up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended lightsabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven

PCZ ISSUE: 133



HALO

After two years, the Xbox masterpiece has come home to the PC. It may be visually long in the tooth, but its exceptional multiplayer mayhem, superb vehicles and solid solo missions puts it squarely in our hall of fame.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Bungie/Gearbox

PCZ ISSUE: 135

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more.

Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE: 120

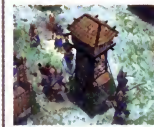


RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all-round freshness make *Rise Of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games

PCZ ISSUE: 129



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE: 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios

PCZ ISSUE: 132



WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE: 128



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios

PCZ ISSUE: 135



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb-looking game with well-designed sides that offers fun in spades.

PUB EA **DEV** EA Pacific/Westwood

PCZ ISSUE: 127



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE: 108

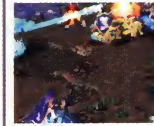


HOMEWORLD 2

The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Relic

PCZ ISSUE: 134



WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE: 119

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best developing houses on the planet.

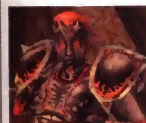
PUB: Activision **DEV:** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 93**



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 117**



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they're still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 118**



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

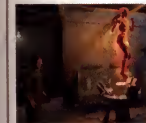
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential if PC role-playing's your thang.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 137**



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios **PCZ ISSUE 121**

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set-pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 125



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft **PCZ ISSUE 138**



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 136**



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 71**



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 126**



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 127**



SOUL REAVER 2

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and in our opinion, all the better for it.

PUB Atari **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Computer Artworks **PCZ ISSUE 121**



BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

It has its detractors, but nobody can deny that the third *Broken Sword* game seamlessly reinvents the traditional point-and-click into the realm of 3D. The dialogue may grate, but it's still well worth a look.

PUB THQ **DEV** Revolution **PCZ ISSUE 136**

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

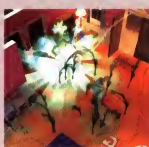
PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenille and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

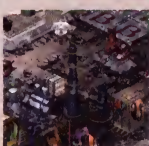
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 135



SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering **DEV** Firefly Studios
PCZ ISSUE 136



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

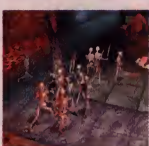
PUB VU Games **DEV** Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES



Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2: Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, plus more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** 1C: Madox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128



MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the bods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.

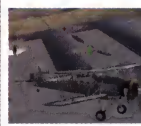
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Microsoft
PCZ ISSUE 133



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

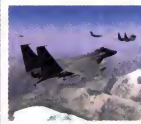
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software
PCZ ISSUE 103



SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

A flight sim with a strong emphasis on fun, rather than flaps, navigation and perfect landings. If you want some intense arcade action with an engaging console-style reward system, look no further.

PUB Activision **DEV** Lucasarts
PCZ ISSUE 137



LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

It may not get the heart pounding as much as WWII sims, but *Lock On*, with vast terrain to explore and a huge range of enemies to explode at long range, is the best (and pretty much only) modern flight-fight game to buy.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Eagle Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 138

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117



PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *PlanetSide* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP
PCZ ISSUE 130



ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMORPG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, *Anarchy Online* is an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom
PCZ ISSUE 114



A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMORPG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis **DEV** eGenesis
PCZ ISSUE 133

MULTIPLAYER MODS

COUNTER-STRIKE (HALF-LIFE)



Despite the troubled single-player release, it seems that *Counter-Strike* will always be the mod that rules the Earth. The popularity of this terrorist versus counter-terrorist mod shows no sign of abating, and there are few PC gamers who don't have a mental map of the troublespots of de_dust. At one point there were more CS servers than every other online game put together, and it isn't going to leave us any time soon.

WEB www.counter-strike.net

THE SPECIALISTS



Blending *Half-Life* Team Deathmatch with kung-fu, slo-mo gymnastics make this a must-play mod. With a range of maps and *Matrix*-esque bullet trails, it provides a nice break from the über-realism of *Counter-Strike*.

WEB www.specialistsmod.net

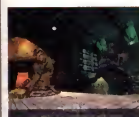
DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)



This *Battlefield 1942* TC focuses on desert-based conflicts from the last decade, playing through scraps like the original Desert Storm and the troubles in Somalia. It's extraordinarily popular and really rather good.

WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)



This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against the aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes this a sure-fire winner.

WEB www.natural-selection.org

DAY OF DEFEAT (HALF-LIFE)



This atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed *Half-Life* mod covers various battles from deep within WWI. Its different character classes and superb arsenal of weapons add to authenticity, fun and general carnage.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3



Featuring some of the best handling we've ever seen, as well as an excellent new career mode, *Colin McRae 3* is a must-have racer. Driving conditions are realistic, the tracks are varied and the detail overwhelming.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 131

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND



Illegal street racing, jazzed-up supercars and such a strong sense of speed that you yelp when you turn corners. *Underground* is a superbly designed and extraordinarily pretty tonic for testosterone-added speed freaks.

PUB EA DEV Black Box

PCZ ISSUE 137

GRAND PRIX 4



You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Atari DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119

SPORT

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04



A fresh season is added to the *CM4* canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 137

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3



Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than *FIFA* in every conceivable way (bar the official licence of course), there is no greater footie experience available.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 136

VIRTUA TENNIS



Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3



This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision DEV Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004



Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', you'll find it difficult to put down.

PUB EA Sports DEV Headgate Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135

SPACE COMBAT

X2: THE THREAT



Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the Universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138

FREELANCER



Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128

X - GOLD



The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82

TERMINUS



Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion - we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk DEV Vicarious Visions

PCZ ISSUE 93

Freespace 2



Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but suffers from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay DEV Volition Inc

PCZ ISSUE 84

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.



DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ The New Year is well underway, with the drought that was January long since passed, taking with it our good intentions and New Year's resolutions. But don't despair, because if you made a resolution to play the best demos before your mates, you've come to the right place. This month, we've got eight – yes, eight! – exclusives you won't be able to get in any other magazine.

Do you like big guns and even bigger explosions? Of course you do, so check out the eagerly anticipated, newly-enlisted Classic, *Unreal Tournament 2004* (which arrived in our offices just as the discs were leaving), and the giggle-producing stake-fest that is *Painkiller*. Prefer propshafts and drivetrains? We've also got the demo for the best driving game on the PC to date, *Colin McRae Rally 04*.

Alternatively, if you prefer something a bit more serious, then why not try something from our fine selection of war games. Tasty starters include tactical shooters *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and *Alpha Black Zero*, followed by the FPS multiplayer main course of *Vietcong: Fist Alpha*. The feast is rounded off with the RTS dessert of *Desert Rats vs Afrika Korps*. Yum.

All of which brings me to the end of my column this month. But before I go, if your first love is RPG, then don't worry, I haven't forgotten you. Check out *Sacred* on the discs too, a neat demo with hours of gameplay. Until next month...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

CD1/DVD Pub: Atari
Dev: Epic/Digital Extremes
Reviewed: Issue 138, 91%

Have we got a treat for you! Not one, not four, but six game modes and five stunning maps to feast your sadistic tendencies on. It's one of the largest, best and most entertaining demos ever, and you've got it all, exclusively with PC ZONE.

In this behemoth of a demo, you can try your hand at the new Onslaught mode, replete with an array of vehicles that take the UT series to the next stage of virtual-gladiatorial combat. With a physics engine to die for, gorgeous graphics and gameplay as cerebral as it is frenetic, you and your team-mates must capture and link a set of power nodes to your base, before killing off the opposing team's stronghold. Of course, you'll only be able to do this once you've captured and held on to all the



Huh? What the hell are you doing down there?

power nodes – harder than it may sound.

Making a welcome return after its absence from *UT2003* is Assault mode. Here, you and your team must capture or defend a base, completing – or thwarting the completion of – a set of objectives along the way. The assault level here,

AS-Convoy, sees a fleet of huge vehicles steaming across a desert carrying a deadly payload of missiles. To capture them, you'll have to activate cranes to help you jump from one giant lorry to the next, while defenders man turrets to keep the attackers at bay. There's a time limit too, so you can't afford to be complacent.

With Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, CTF and Bombing Run modes also on the demo, there are hours of fun to be had. Plus, with the new vehicles it'll take you days to master this must-have piece of software. Time to get fraggin'!



FUN WITH FRAGS

UT2004 CONTAINS LOADS OF 'SPECIAL MOMENTS' – LITTLE EXTRAS THAT EPIC HAS THROWN INTO THE MIX JUST TO KEEP THINGS INTERESTING. LIKE THESE...



Bump And Roll

If the killing begins to bore, try taking one of the Hellbenders in Onslaught mode for a spin. Hit a ramp, flip through the air and land with the style and grace of a ballerina. For this, you'll be rewarded with a stunt ranking, showing number of flips, degrees rotated, time and so on.



Slice And Dice

Not every kill has to be earned with hot fiery lead shot from your powerful pistols. Grab the Scorpion in Onslaught, hit the alternative fire mode and enjoy the *Deathrace 2000*-style blade action that results. Boadicea herself would have been proud of you, my son.



Twist And Shout

Hit the optional text-to-voice mode in the sound options and you'll soon be greeted with a distended Stephen Hawking-alike voiceover when someone types you a text. Alternatively, you can link a microphone to your chops and order your bots via voice commands.

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08700 711482**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email **pc_zone@interchange.co.uk**.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant

information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

PAINKILLER

CD1/DVD Pub: DreamCatcher **Dev:** People Can Fly

Our exclusive *Painkiller* demo features two full levels from the depths of hell: Chapter 3 Level 3 'City on Water' (an ultra-violent Venice); and Chapter 3 Level 5 'Ruins', starring massive end-of-level boss Thor. You can also choose between four difficulty settings, although Trauma is only unlocked when you complete the demo on Nightmare (no mean feat without any mid-level saves). You have a total of three weapons to play with (see box).

City on Water begins with you on the outskirts of the level, so look behind you to find the boxes of ammo needed to take on the enemies ahead of you. As you enter the city, look left to see your first targets – two careless goons standing on exploding barrels.

Once you've fought your way across the Bridge of Sighs, finish off the undead bikers on the ledges of buildings and the red pentacle should appear. Don't forget to collect the green souls of departed enemies as you progress, as 100 of these turns you into an all-powerful demon able to slay anything in its path.

Eventually, after much more killing, you'll find yourself outside a beautifully-detailed building decorated with ornate paintings, where hell literally breaks loose. Next, head on to a level with a fountain containing some very hard skull-headed beasts – obliterate everything and you'll finally reach the end of level by entering the spinning white pentacle. Phew!

Chapter 3 Level 5 involves you shooting Thor's giant hammer until it breaks (he uses it to recharge his health and to bash the ground, causing you damage). You then blast him until he croaks – the red circle at the top of the screen shows how you're doing. Hint: jump when he's about to bash his weapon on the ground.



Big boss. Big gun. Big mistake.



THREE OF A KIND

PAINKILLER'S GRUESOME ARSENAL PACKS A DEADLY DOUBLE-FIRE PUNCH



The Painkiller

Your basic weapon. A nasty combination of spinning blade for close-up frags and a hilarious grappling hook that can pull baddies screaming from the top of buildings.



Chain Gun

Main fire launches devastating rockets at distant targets – not to be used in confined spaces. Alternative fire is a machine gun that can tear enemies to shreds with fast-flowing bullets.



Stake Gun

Found half-way through the City on Water level, this little sucker can pin enemies to walls, floors and ceilings with wooden spikes. Also has a nifty grenade launcher.



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

CD1/DVD Pub: Codemasters **Dev:** Codemasters **Reviewed:** Issue 140, 84%

Picture the scene – a beautiful evergreen forest surrounds you, the tall trees reaching majestically into the sky. A dusty track leads between the trees and you listen with delight to the sounds of the woodland around you. But then the silence is shattered by the sound of a tuned car engine spitting decidedly non-environmentally-safe flames. Yes, this isn't one for nature lovers, but the petrol-head extravaganza that is *Colin McRae Rally 04*.

He might not be doing too well in the WRC, but the game named after him goes

from strength to strength and this, its fourth outing, is the best so far.

In this demo, you get to slide around three stages from the USA to Japan and Finland. The Citroën Xsara is the only car you can drive, but it's good enough for Sebastian Loeb. He's won the Swedish rally with the Citroën, putting him and the manufacturer at the forefront of the WRC standings – so no blaming your poor driving skills on the car...

You can take full control over all car settings, with everything from suspension stiffness to gearing being adjustable. Of course, if you can't tell your suspension arm from your elbow, you can opt for the safe option of default settings. The key, as with all rally driving games, is to master the art of sideways driving.

Rally 04 copes with it superbly, letting you oversteer all the way to the finishing line.



Get your arse out. Although not literally, please...



SACRED

CD2/DVD Pub: Deep Silver Dev: Ascaron

If you like RPGs, your happiness will be modified +10 by playing this massive demo, which took us a whole afternoon to get through. To finish the demo, you have to complete three main missions, but you can wander about between these to find sub-quests that provide you with extra weapons and armour.

As ever, levelling up your character is

an essential part of the game and as well as the usual line-up of statistics such as strength and dexterity, new combat skills are also on offer.

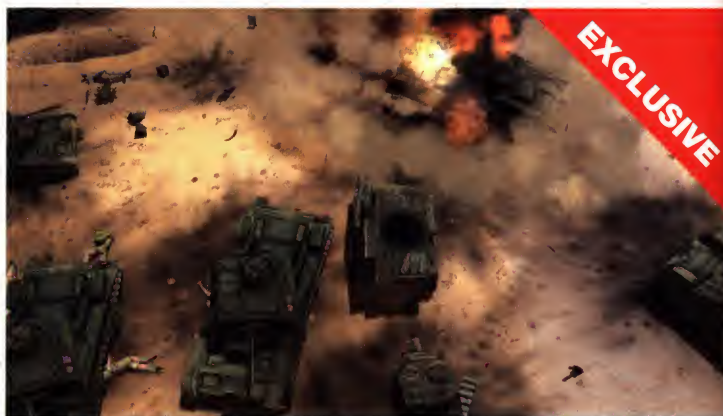
Once you've met The Master, custom one-click combos can be created from your selection of combat skills and spells, enabling you to wow your friends with impressive-looking and powerful moves.



"You'll have to swing more than your big chopper to impress us."

DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters Dev: Monte Cristo



The British get tanked up.

In a pleasant deviation from the norm, this RTS sees you playing on the side of the Axis forces as commander Hartmann. Your German troops have been sent to help out some sorely-tested Italians, who've captured a narrow gorge in Libyan territory and are now holding it against a retaliatory British force.

To get a good idea of how the battlefield lies, it's best to work zoomed

out – but make sure you zoom in for detail. If you want to pause proceedings and give yourself a quick breather before diving back into the action, use the space bar.

Once you've successfully repelled the British attack, take your troops and use your recon vehicle to scout out the hiding location of the remaining Allied forces. Then hold back the guilt as you blast the hell out of them. You bloody traitor.

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

SINGLE AND MULTIPLAYER (DVD ONLY)

CD2/DVD Pub: Take 2

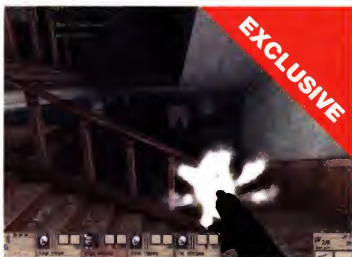
Dev: Illusion Softworks

Reviewed: Issue 136, 88%

Listen up! This is Operation Overlord, codename Blade Dancer. Some US paratroopers are trapped in a bank near the square. Your mission is to rescue these allies, but you'll need to take out any snipers you see to facilitate your escape. During the game, you can toggle a tactical screen with the space bar and play the game much like an RTS. You can also switch the game to FPS mode with the C key – making shooting a lot easier.



A gun with optics is essential.



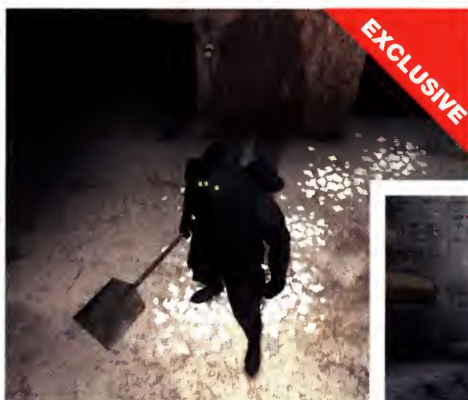
Have that Nazi scum!

Once you make your way towards the square, there will be quite a few Nazi encounters. So, as you move down the street, use the buildings to your advantage and make your men keep a low profile. Once you've made contact with your allies, you'll need to defend the bank where they're hiding until reinforcements arrive. And stay hidden from the tank outside!

If you've got the DVD, you can also try the multiplayer demo with an Occupation map (Normandy3) and an Objectives map (Czech3). The first sees you vying for control of a bridge, the latter tasks the two sides with assassinating/protecting a VIP.

SPLINTER CELL

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: In-house



Sam digs up some dirt.

This official new level for the stealth masterpiece picks up the adventures of Sam Fisher where the original game left off. Taking you to the icy steppes of Russia, your mission is to infiltrate one of Nicoladze's last remaining terror cells, codename Kola Cell.

Your objectives are simple: enter the facility, access the computer mainframe and track down an evil hacking mastermind. Of course, nothing is ever that simple in the topsy-turvy world of

KOLA CELL LEVEL



Stealth gardening with Mr Fisher.

international terrorism, and you'll need to use every trick in the spy handbook to get you through. Pay particular attention to the laser tripwires – they're everywhere!

To get the level to work, you'll need to install the new patch. We've included it on the DVD, but because of space issues we couldn't fit it on the CDs. You can download it from www.pczone.co.uk.

PLUS: CAMPAIGNS AND UTILITIES FOR IL-2 STURMOVIK, OFFICIAL MAPS FOR WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE, NEW MAPS FOR AGE OF MYTHOLOGY AND ALL THE LATEST PATCHES

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 114. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is double-sided. Flip it over and you'll find The Essential Selection, which gives you the ten best demos of the last year (including *Far Cry*, *Max Payne 2* and *X2*), the ten most popular mods, plus an exhaustive library of patches, drivers, utilities and modding tools. Everything you need to make your mates dead jealous, in fact.

ALPHA BLACK ZERO

DVD Pub: Deep Silver **Dev:** Ascaron

You are Lieutenant Kyle Hardlaw, leader of specialised commando unit Alpha Black Zero. This means the choice is yours whether to lead your soldiers by example from the front lines, or hide at the back like a big girl.

The first level sees you start at one

end of an impressive looking outdoor terrain, courtesy of the tweaked *Serious Sam* engine. Your objective is to make your way across the landscape to the foundry construct, in which the second level is set. Groups of enemies are located throughout the landscape and



The team arrived by tube.



Kyle lays down the 'Hardlaw'.

will naturally try to make your life difficult.

The second level is set within the industrial complex of the foundry construct. It features tight corridors and cramped spaces and feels much different to fighting outside.

You can issue commands to your

soldiers using the numbers along your keyboard: initially to select which team member you're issuing orders to, and then to choose from the options listed. You can take direct control over any of the soldiers by shift-pressing the relevant number.



Sonic frees his Willy.



Sonic drives himself round the bend.

SONIC ADVENTURE DX

DVD Pub: Sega **Dev:** In-house

Everyone's favourite hedgehog is back, with this director's cut of *Sonic Adventure DX*. Any respectable gamer should know the score on this one – collect the rings and survive the level with as many intact as possible. You can choose from six characters: Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, Amy Rose, Big the Cat, or E102 Gamma.



VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA MULTIPLAYER

DVD Pub: Take 2 **Dev:** Pterodon **Reviewed:** Issue 139, 70%

There are two levels on offer here and you can choose to play as a Yank or the VC. The Stream level is based around, you guessed it, a meandering stream, while the Bridge level is centred around a rickety rope bridge strewn over a gaping chasm. It signals the midpoint of this map and also leaves you extremely vulnerable as you cross!



For sale: one helicopter. Needs TLC.

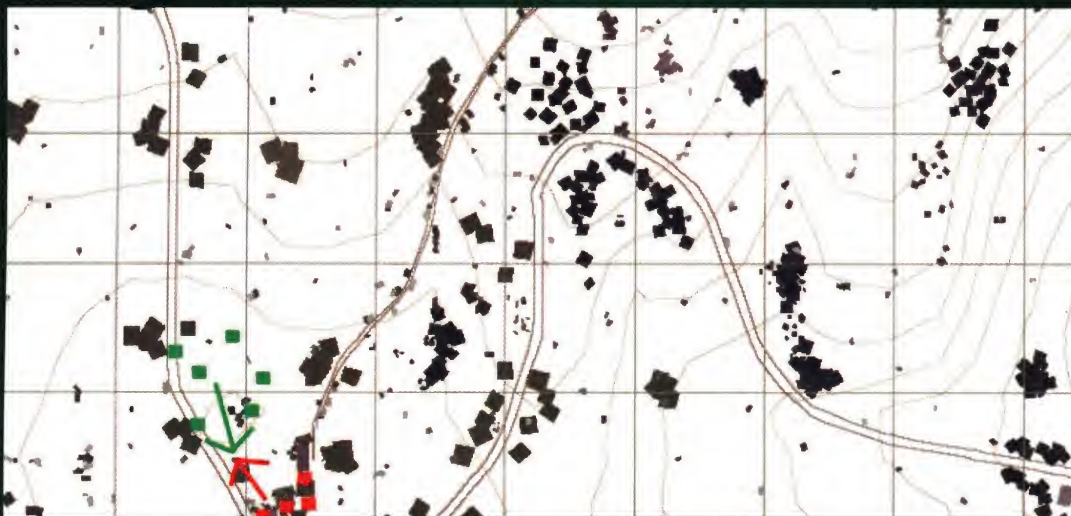


The Bridge of Death awaits.



Get that damn lampshade!

ALSO ON THE DVD... DEMOS OF *WORLD RACING*, *FAST LANES BOWLING*, *WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED* AND *SPACE HASTE 2*, ALL THE PATCHES YOU COULD NEED, *SVEN CO-OP*, *CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT 2* QUEST FOR *MORROWIND* AND A NEW SCENARIO TO PLAY IN *GHOST MASTER*. PLUS TOOLS AND MAP PACKS FOR YOUR FAVOURITE SHOOTER, THE NEWEST MOVIES (INCLUDING A FIRST GLIMPSE OF *STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT*), ALL THE REVIEWED MODS FROM THE ONLINE SECTION AND *OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS* – THIS MONTH'S CANDIDATE FOR GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD. PHEW!



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

It wasn't the best looking game in its class, nor the most glamorous and certainly not the easiest to get to grips with – but for sheer scale, detail and realism, no shooter before or since has come close. *Richie Shoemaker* goes behind the Iron Curtain

GAME Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis
DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive Studio
RELEASED June 2001

INFLUENCED It was once written: "Bohemia Interactive Studio has developed a very special title, one which leaps so far ahead of the projected evolution of the genre that it practically starts a whole fresh game category." Sadly, the writer of those words was a suit in the employ of the game's publisher. Strangely, though, his comments were spot on.

PROFILE

Brought up on a diet of borscht and Communist propaganda, Marek Spanel began his career developing basic games on an outdated computer with his brother. Today, he heads a games studio that's loved by gamers, respected by other developers and admired by the military, with a million-selling title under his belt and a team that spans the globe.



NAME Marek Spanel
ROLE ON FLASHPOINT
Project leader
FIRST GAME WORKED ON

BLOOD for the Atari 800 (no, we've never heard of it either).

NOW WORKING ON Operation Flashpoint 2, previous to which Bohemia had begun work on a 3D RPG.

1985 was clearly an important year for Marek Spanel. While the rest of us were glued to *EastEnders* or fiddling with transforming robots, the youth that would later found Czech developer Bohemia Interactive Studio was behind the Iron Curtain, unaware that things were about to change forever.

Not that Marek or elder brother Ondrej could give a toss that the Politburo had just selected Mikhail Gorbachev as the new leader of the Communist Party. No, there were far more important events unfolding around them, events that would soon result in them being in possession of a Texas Instruments 99/4 home computer with a 3.3MHz processor and a full 16KB of RAM. And to them, this was one

Western commodity that was even more valuable than a pair of Levi's.

"How it got into our home in those old communist days is another story," winks Marek. "But the only thing we were concerned with was that we hadn't any games for it – and we really wanted to play games badly. We were probably the only users of that type of computer in the entire country at the time, and the only thing we could do with it was to learn how to program its built-in BASIC language."

The duo soon began to enjoy the process of making games more than they did playing them and soon realised that they'd found their calling.

"Ondrej was always the smarter one," recalls Marek modestly. "He was an

excellent programmer. I tried to keep up with him but I never could – what took him 15 minutes to code took me a day.”

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

Having upgraded to an Atari 800, the two brothers continued to learn their craft, creating a number of titles mostly for their own amusement. There was some recognition for their home-grown talents, but it wasn't until they moved on to bigger and better machines that the idea for an expansive 3D action game began to take root.

The first real attempt to fulfil their ambition was *Gravon*, a futuristic 3D tank game that might have been better remembered had it not been released for

the short-lived Atari Falcon, at a time when most computer-gamers had already moved over to PC.

“We always tried to create a game in a large and dynamic exterior world and *Flashpoint* was our second attempt,” says Marek. “After *Gravon*, we wanted to create a 3D clone of the 8-bit classic *River Raid*, but such limited and linear gameplay just didn't inspire us.”

For their next point of inspiration, Marek and Ondrej looked closer to home. And given their surroundings, it didn't take long to find a suitably rich theme, one that would allow them to create a vast, interactive and dynamic world, through which the player could enjoy almost unbounded freedom.

“Growing up in the Communist bloc, the '80s were very close to us,” says Marek. “It was the time when we started to think more about the world around us and to see through all the lies and official propaganda. I was listening to Voice Of America every night and Ronald Reagan was scaring the communist regimes.”

“This period was a very important and influential part of our lives, so it was only logical for it to be the focus of the game. Of course, it also allowed us to include all sorts of weapons and vehicles that we were already familiar with.”

Marek admits: “When we started work on the game that would become *Flashpoint*, we weren't aware of any other titles that shared the same concept or

themes. As time passed, games like *Spec Ops*, *Delta Force* and *Rainbow Six* were released, which pushed us to add and improve the infantry part more than we ever expected. But we always followed our own path.”

A KIND OF MAGIC

Poseidon, as the project was then known, took the team almost three years to develop. Back then, the game was a far more open-ended and dynamic military sim than the one we know and love, with no linear mission structure and little storyline to speak of. Even so, it quickly caught the attention of US-based Interactive Magic. The publisher saw the potential of the unique 3D engine, able to





Flashpoint's hook was the ability to control any vehicle you could find.

render vast and varied geography across which all manner of ground vehicles, aircraft and foot soldiers could move with very little processing effort.

On a visit to the PC ZONE offices in the spring of 1999, Interactive Magic demonstrated the game's day and night cycles, with shadows lengthening as the sun arced from

zenith to darkening horizon. It was an impressive demo, and our only scepticism arose from the back-catalogue of the developer. Unfortunately, Interactive Magic folded within months of its visit.

BOHEMIAN CRAPSODY

"We were a team of just four people when we signed our first contract," says Marek.

"We really didn't know anything about gaming as a business. We were naive, driven by pure enthusiasm. We felt we were in no position to pick and choose, plus we believed in anything Western or American, so we considered the contract a real success and it truly helped us to keep going with the development.

"When it became clear that Interactive Magic was in serious financial trouble, we had to decide what to do. By forming Bohemia Interactive as a company, it gave us the impetus to carry on. We managed to acquire extra funding and increase the team. Poseidon then changed its name to Flashpoint 1985 and the game became much more ambitious."

Bohemia's problems weren't over, though. In the process of Interactive Magic's liquidation, all of its unreleased licences fell to rising French publisher Ubisoft. Despite the fact that Flashpoint was starting to take shape, Ubi released Bohemia from its contract, an act that would prove to be very short-sighted.

According to a PR spokesperson at the time, the game was dropped because its military themes were at odds with the company's family image, its biggest property at the time being Rayman. Ironic then that today, Ubisoft's most valuable franchises include Rainbow Six and Splinter Cell.



Teamwork was key to any victory.

BIG FACT HUNT

Did you know... Codemasters introduced its anti-piracy software FADE into Operation Flashpoint. Enter the wrong access code and the game gradually became so hard to play that most would give up. Of course, the game was so bloody hard anyway it was difficult to tell the difference.

"It just didn't work out for us," remembers Marek. "It was a bit more complicated in legal terms; but mostly Ubisoft and ourselves just couldn't find a common interest in the project. Maybe it was more interested in its later acquisition of Red Storm... I guess we'll never find out."

GLAD TO BE OF HELP

Despite the lack of publisher support, the newly created Bohemia Interactive Studio forged quietly ahead with its ambitious plans. Here at PC ZONE, we were incredulous that no publisher seemed interested in the game, and we badgered Bohemia to allow us to run a preview.

Understandably, the team was cautious of external interests, and made us wait until the game was ready to be unveiled properly. When it was, via a new website and a trailer showing extensive gameplay footage, interest in the game just exploded.

"At the beginning of 2000, we'd been looking for a publisher for quite a long time," remembers Marek. "Then suddenly, it was early summer and three big

THE FUTURE

FLASHPOINT GOES GLOBAL

It's only three years since Operation Flashpoint was released, yet very few games have managed to come anywhere near its level of detail. Games that blended first-person combat with vehicular action have tended to err on the side of arcade-style gameplay, whereas the more tactical squad-level games like Rainbow Six 3 have stuck to formula and left vehicles out altogether. Perhaps publishers are sceptical, as they were before, that the market for a game such as Flashpoint is too small. Certainly, if sales are anything to go by, that kind of logic appears to be utter nonsense.

All of which means that the only game poised to supersede Flashpoint is Operation Flashpoint 2, which we know very little about at this stage. We understand the game is to have a global setting, with a brand-new graphics engine and extensive multiplayer options. All will become clear at E3 this May, and you can be sure we'll be at the head of the queue to quiz Marek and the lads about their progress.



More trucks in Flashpoint 2?





Way I understand it, Malden's coming down with a bad case of the Reds.

Special Forces missions provided a break from regular soldiering.



Flashpoint's multi-user vehicles predated Battlefield 1942.

publishers started to show an interest in the game. And after reading the article in *PC ZONE*, Codemasters invited us over to its offices in Warwick."

Marek continues: "The company seemed a bit more interested in the game as a *game*, rather than just a commercial property. It also had the feel of a family-run type of business – so in the end, we decided that its offer was the best and signed a deal."

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Even then, Bohemia's problems weren't completely over. There were numerous technical difficulties internally, many of which stemmed from the extended development time and the perhaps over-ambitious blueprint.

"Our graphics engine was originally created before any real 3D acceleration was possible," recalls the Bohemia founder. "DirectX 2.0 just didn't offer what we needed. Later on, we could have opted for an off-the-shelf engine like Quake or Unreal, but none of them could

deliver what we needed. Even if they had, we didn't have the money to license them, so it was never an option anyway."

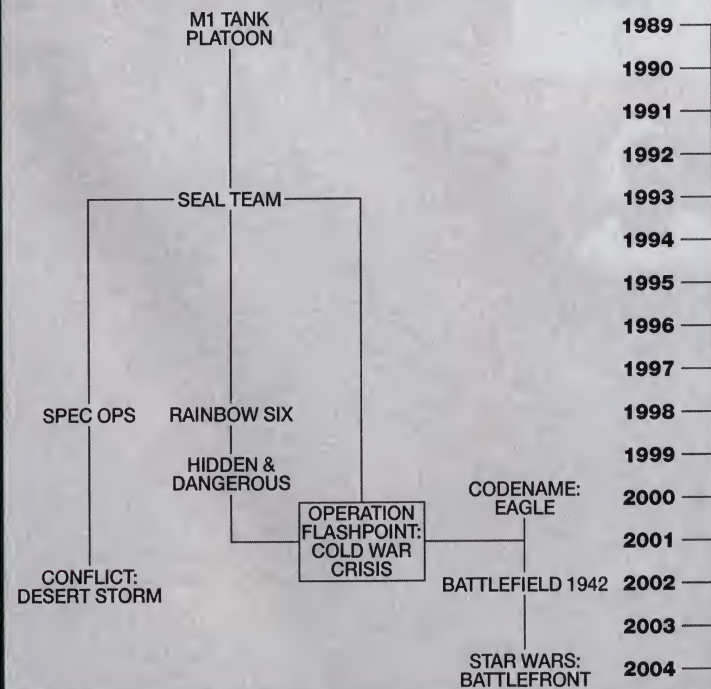
Even so, development moved rapidly once Codemasters was on board. Interest in the game continued to grow, causing even more revisions to the game design. Codies decided that without stable multiplayer facilities, the game would risk stalling in the rabid US market, and this meant Bohemia's headaches multiplied even further.

"Looking back, the multiplayer game was never strong and we had to work more on it after the game's release," Marek admits. "It would have been fantastic to have had rock-solid multiplayer facilities, the game would risk stalling in the rabid US market, and this meant Bohemia's headaches multiplied even further."

"Sometimes we started to worry about how long we'd been working on the game, but generally the progress was always constant and visible, and we never really got bogged down. Now, ten years since we started on *Flashpoint*, I can honestly say that I don't regret anything

FAMILY TREE

Operation Flashpoint draws as much influence from the likes of *Seal Team* (1993) and *M1 Tank Platoon* (1989) as it does from more modern tactical shooters like *Spec Ops* (1998) and *Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear* (1999). As for the titles it's influenced, it's a bit too early to make a call – but clearly, the game's combination of hardcore depth and simple interface has had some impact on the likes of *Battlefield 1942*, *Joint Operations*, *UT2004* and *Star Wars: Battlefront*.



and I'm still happy with the game... We surpassed our original vision many times."

JUST DESSERTS

Some months prior to the game's eventual release, a playable demo was released – and within days it was calculated that over a million people had downloaded it. Bohemia was understandably amazed.

On its eventual full release in June 2001, *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* topped the charts across Europe – and within a few short months it had reached the magic one million sales figure. Today, after the release of the *Red Hammer* and

Coalescent Technologies, a company that had worked with the US military for years, and assigned our newly formed team in Australia to the project.

"After a year in development, the VBS1 (Virtual Battlefield System) project debuted across the worldwide servers of the US Marine Corps. Today, a number of other military organisations are using VBS1 and even regular *Flashpoint* as training tools. We're also continuing to work towards improving it for the military."

We're sure the irony isn't lost on the Bohemia team that a game from the former Eastern Bloc is today used to train Western armies. It's also true to say that, in

"Ten years since we began *Flashpoint*, I'm still happy with it... We surpassed our original vision many, many times"

MAREK SPANEL
DIRECTOR, BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE STUDIO

Resistance expansion packs, sales of the game exceed 1.2 million.

As fans will recall, the story didn't end there. It wasn't just the public taking an interest in the game – the military had caught wind of *Flashpoint*'s realism and detail too. It was rumoured the British Army had taken a keen interest, but of course, having commissioned tailor-made versions of *Doom* and *Rainbow Six* in the past, the US had to go one better...

"They took a real interest in our game engine," says Marek. "We teamed up with

many ways, Bohemia Interactive has been the vanguard for a new invasion on the West by developers from Eastern Europe.

"I know there are many successful games from countries of the former Soviet Bloc and I'm confident it's going to continue," concludes Marek. "I'm not sure we're figureheads, but I hope the success we've had with *Operation Flashpoint* will show other ambitious developers – wherever they may be – that it's possible to succeed, even with your first project and with a young team."



THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

How do you make a game truly epic? John McLean-Foreman is here to tell you: "It's all about story, baby!"



WHEN I was a reporter and still struggling to land my first job as a fiction writer, I used to work from home most of the time. My ex (and

you'll see why she's an ex shortly) never understood that just because I was in the house, it didn't mean that I was available for conversation. It took me so long to get into the minds of my characters that any interruption meant starting all over again. So, in an attempt to truly emphasise how important it was that I be left alone, I'd slam the office door in her face. Yeah, yeah, I know. I was a jerk.

I don't know about other writers, but for me to be able to write effectively, I not only need to be able to feel the actual emotions of my characters, but I have to experience the world through the

disrupting your mental flow, you grumpy git? Well then, time to try 50 co-workers instead. If you ever want to get a job writing for a videogame developer, my advice is you learn to shift your focus back and forth between tasks as quickly as possible. It'll make things so much easier.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK...

Another thing to prepare yourself for is that everyone in the office will have ideas they want to see added to the story. Obviously, some of them are going to be deplorable, but then, so will a whole heap of yours. The trick is that you need to be willing to discard what doesn't work in favour of what does – and if that means you have to dump one of your beloved concepts in favour of someone else's, then so be it.

When I first started working at Black & White Studios, things were relatively easy



example, has very strict laws regarding what can and can't be shown in videogames. In fact, if you really look at their laws closely, the main thing they're worried about is excessive and graphic violence. As anyone who has read my monthly comic book *Patient Zero* will tell you, I love to delve into the very disturbing elements of what it means to be human. There are some pretty horrible things that happen in all my work, but the thing is that you don't need to show it, and you certainly don't need to glorify it.

SITTING COMFORTABLY?

On the topic of need, do you really need a story in a videogame at all? No, of course you don't – but I believe that if the goal is for the players to have an emotional reaction to the characters, then you do.

It's very easy to write something that suggests to the player they're about to be attacked by the computer. All you have to do is write the scene. For instance, you can have a huge group of Norse warriors charging over the hill screaming and



Story should complement gameplay.

waving their axes. Job done. However, if you want the player to feel outrage, jealousy, remorse, joy or any other of a wide range of emotions that makes the Norse charge meaningful, you have to layer in the more complex story elements that will do that.

I could go on endlessly about the story, about what a rush it is to see our artists and animators bring life to characters that were recently nothing more than words. I could blather on about great actors that convey a subtlety and subtext to the dialogue, the music that draws you into the cut-scenes and sweeps you along, or even the cinematography that communicates through the slightest of camera shifts. Sadly though, we've come to the end of the diary once more.

I do really love the topic, though. Maybe we'll have to return and talk about the story and cinematography soon. I'll see if I can't get PJ to teach you some of his tricks. **PJ**

"PJ was in the office for 20 minutes before I decided he was from hell"

JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN
FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD

distortion of their biases. It takes me about 15 minutes, but with focus and a bit of luck, I can transport myself into their world to the point where I can almost touch it.

In those rare moments where it works really well, I can smell the earth of the forest; I can hear the sound of rain falling onto the grass; I can feel the sword as it slides under my ribs and rips open my heart... It's a bit of a surreal experience, but from the moment that I manage it, I become completely lost for three hours at a time; words spill from my fingers as if I'm taking dictation. That doesn't mean that what I write is always good – in fact, I can pretty much guarantee that the first three drafts of anything I put to paper is bloody awful. But as long as I remain undisturbed, then I'm a step ahead.

Therefore it comes as no surprise that karma has bitten me on the arse – payback for my deplorable behaviour, you might say. Couldn't cope with one girlfriend

for me. Everyone involved in the story was more or less thinking along the same lines and it was shaping up quite nicely... Until he came along. His name was, and is, PJ the cinematographer. PJ was in the office for about 20 minutes before I decided that he was from hell and that I wanted him to die. It didn't matter what I said, he thought the idea was terrible. I can't tell you how many times I had to start the story from scratch simply because of his input. The worst part about it was that he was very frequently right. Damn him.

TO ME, TO YOU

There are actually a lot of things that can influence a story in a game. First, you have to remember that the story is there to support the game, not compete with it. As such, you want to interrupt the player as infrequently as possible, with story elements just long enough to get the point across in a meaningful way.

Another thing that has to be taken into consideration is censorship. Germany, as an



Write a story well and players will feel a great attachment to characters.



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UNVEILED!

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Halo 2 Vs Killzone

PS2 and Xbox heavyweights go
head-to head in CVG's shooter showdown

PS3 Unveiled!

And we've also got specs for Xbox 2,
PSP and Nintendo's DS and N-5!

NEXT MONTH

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Massive hands-on preview of the strategy behemoth that's set to conquer the world

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DISCWORLD

Dragons, conspiracy and lovable street starfish were ready for adventure atop Great A'Tuin's noble shell

WEARER of dubious hats and comic storyteller extraordinaire, Terry Pratchett made his big-league gaming debut in early 1995 with a point 'n' clicker that stood almost as tall as the Lucasarts big-hitters.

Discworld had gorgeous cartoon visuals, a dragon-chasing storyline loosely based on his novel *Guards Guards* and star-studded voice talent. The list included Eric Idle (playing the lead rubbish wizard Rincewind), Jon Pertwee, Tony Robinson and a then unknown Rob Brydon (of *Marion And Geoff* fame). It all added up to a winning home-grown adventure.

All the Pratchett stalwarts made their presence felt: Rincewind's psychopathic many-legged Luggage doubled up as your inventory; the Librarian was on hand to hit you if you called him a monkey; and Nanny Ogg gave you a recipe for custard and a few choice innuendos if you were nice to her.

It's also remembered, however, for containing some of the most cryptic and illogical puzzles ever created by man. The frequent angst and fury triggered by getting stuck in *Discworld* wrecked marriages, destroyed monitors and indirectly caused several third-world economies to crumble.



Want to get a monk to take off his robe? Simply go back in time (via the magic of the Library's L-Space) and place a chaos-inducing butterfly on the lamp-post that the monk will be standing next to in the future. This will create a miniature rainstorm in the future that'll get the monk wet and in urgent need of disrobing. Y'see? Simple. Q.E.D.

The game may have been witty and a commendably geeky portrayal of the Pratchett-verse, but anyone who managed to complete it without any outside help deserves a bloody medal.

**RETRO
ZONE
JANUARY
1995**

Will Porter recalls the trauma of a year that saw him dabbling in the murky underworld of sherbert-snorting and alcopop-swiggling. He was only young...

Somehow though, the charm and hilarity that oozed out of its dragon-chasing, mason-baiting storyline covered up its illogical leaps and turns. Proof that, back in the day, Lucas didn't have all the tricks.



Did anyone get the number of that donkey cart?



Great A'Tuin: space turtle extraordinaire.

NEWSFLASH

IT'S JAN 1995 AND...

- Spotty youths throughout the world start off a year in which \$3-billion will be spent on gaming by pumping coins into legendary coin-ops like *Tekken 2* and *Alpine Racer*.
- Bullfrog Productions, domain *Theme Park*, *Populous* and its legendary creator Peter Molyneux, is swallowed whole by Electronic Arts. Yum.
- Bastion, Games PR company and all-round nice fellows, decide to promote *Doom 2* in the national press by sending jiffy bags full of entrails to journalists. Unfortunately, a vegan from *The Independent* is so disgusted that he takes a taxi straight to the Virgin offices to complain, while the *Daily Mail* and *Evening Standard* threaten legal action. In an effort to calm the troubled waters, a Bastion spokesman claims: "We've promised to pay any dry cleaning bills."
- Greg Ivings, classmate and chum of ZONE staff writer Will Porter, buys an Atari Jaguar claiming it's "the greatest console of all time". It isn't. And young Porter promises never to let him forget his stupidity. Ha Ha! Twat!

THE BEST OF THE REST



QUARANTINE (PC)

The oft-forgotten granddaddy of the *Crazy Taxi*'s of today, *Quarantine* made you a cabbie in a grim city of the future, where a contaminated water supply had turned the masses into gun-toting mentalists. Starting out with simple mini-cabbing and moving onto assassination missions and impromptu drive-by shootings, it had a remarkably similar blueprint to a certain Haitian-hating game we know...



ONE MUST FALL 2097 (PC)

A fighting game that could have changed the world if it weren't confined to PC, this had you trying to become the ruler of Jupiter's moon, Ganymede. Through the means of a giant robot fighting contest. Obviously. Intuitive controls, customisable bots and the fact that most of the game was available as shareware meant that it whupped the ass of the over-hyped and over-plugged *Rise Of The Robots*.



VOYEUR (PC)

This is one of the snorefest FMV-athons created in the aftermath of the CD-ROM revolution, when games programmers felt a need to fill up discs with B-Movie actresses standing around in their pants, waving. Ostensibly a political thriller in which you stared into the windows of a presidential candidate's manor to uncover a crime, it was mainly bought by people who wanted to see women in their pants. Waving.



ECSTATICA (PC)

You didn't know fear until you'd been chased around *Ecstatica*'s elliptical environs by a nasty werewolf that was impossible to kill (even if Martin Korda did think it was a giant monkey). *Ecstatica* was truly creepy, so don't be fooled by the fluffy, colourful screenshot: Satan dwelled here. A true forerunner to the *Survival Horror* games of today (but oddly amusing at the same time), it was a legendary accomplishment.

Dear WILLDRE

Mouse love has me upside down

Dear Willdre

I'VE DISCOVERED that I prefer my mice to scroll for the other side.

I'm an 18-year-old lad from Billericay, and just recently I realised I feel a lot more comfortable with an inverted mouse. I don't know why, there's just something about an upside-down y-axis that gets me going.

When I'm with my pals, I lark about and we chat about all the mice we've clicked, but I can't tell them I feel more comfortable approaching the other end of the mouse-mat.

Is this wrong? Did my mother make me play too many flight sims as a child? I feel like I'm living a lie.

Spatula, Billericay

WILLDRE SAYS: What many people don't understand, Spatula, is that inverted mice users have the same rights and needs as any other gamer. If anyone tells you different, then they're a rotten imbecile and should be ignored. Famous inverted mouse users include Robert Louis Stephenson, the guy who played Krychek in the *X-files* and Michael Palin. So you're not alone. My leaflet on 'Coming To Terms With Cack-hand' should help.

ORC WIFE IS BRUTE AT HOME

Dear Willdre

MY DARLING wife is making demands I cannot cope with.

I'm a happily married elvish basket weaver in the town of Freeport in Norrath. Before my marriage, I was extremely sexually inexperienced with +4 chastity points, but now my half-orc wife Thruddanger, daughter of Koktis the Skullcrusher, is making overly sexual demands that I feel uncomfortable performing.

To make matters worse, she has recently been voyaging to the surrounding dark hills with her best friend Sappho, and I can't help but think that they're spearing more than moss snake.

Should I be worried?

Bob the Weaver, Norrath

WILLDRE SAYS: I admire you Bob. Many would shy away from falling in love with giant, ugly green monsters with voracious sexual appetites, so pride yourself in your +3 perception of

Thruddanger's inner beauty.

Why don't you slaughter a goat and discuss your insecurities over a candlelit dinner? Alternatively, you could explore the possibility that Thruddanger (if that is her REAL name) is actually a fat librarian from Dallas.

In which case, you should consider going outside and marvelling at god's creation rather than sitting in front of your computer, eating Wotsits and pissing into an empty 5-Alive carton. Good luck!

Doom-ed to forbidden love

Dear Willdre

I'VE DEVELOPED feelings for a cold-blooded killer, but all he wants is to finish first.


A few months ago I joined a well-populated deathmatch server and was instantly fragged by 'MeatHaxx3r'. His presence was powerfully attractive and I started to follow him from server to server.

For a while, all I could think of was being on the receiving end of his powerful weapons and I would often throw myself into his hot spray. Soon, I picked up the courage to tell him how I felt, but all I got in response was a cold stare and his big tool in my face. No matter how much I pleaded with him, he would simply impale me, then move on to find someone else.

I tried to explain how I'd helped massage his points, how I'd wilfully received his load to give him satisfaction, but he just wouldn't respond. How do I let him know my true feelings? Or should I be focussing on finishing first myself?

P.Shooter, Wrexham

WILLDRE SAYS: MeatHaxx3r is clearly a user and you're nothing but a n00b plaything to him. Your feelings are all one-way and this will never turn into a meaningful relationship, no matter how good a frag he is. Call for my booklet 'Aren't Men A Bunch Of Fragging Bastards'.



CALL WILLDRE'S HELPLINES

Disc floppy?.....09025 366288

Gamma too high?.....09025 366289

Graphics card envy?09025 366290

Bandwidth bugged?.....09025 366291

Porn stash discovered?09025 366292

Pre-recorded advice lines: Calls cost 60p per minute (plus all vestiges of personal dignity)

SICK OBSESSION WITH SEXY SPRITES

Dear Willdre

I'M SCARED my obsession might be going too far.

Not long ago, I started playing a popular videogame and found myself more and more attracted to one of the key figures. At first it was her looks. Then it was the way she responded to my touch, always willing to please me.

I realised things might have been going too far when I tracked down a real-life model of her and mounted it prominently in my bedroom, so I could gaze at her every night before I got my hands on her again in my dreams. The very last straw was when I took the

model to bed with me and began to touch myself inappropriately while holding her.

Friends have said I'm disturbed and now I'm beginning to believe them. While they all have healthy fantasies about Lara Croft and so on, my flight sim passion for the Sopwith Camel makes me stand out at school. Am I really so wrong?

B.Iggles, Lat. 51:31:28N Lon.

0:06:03W

WILLDRE SAYS: Frankly, that's just sick. I'm calling the police. My pamphlet on 'First World War Aeronautical Sexual Fetishes' should come in handy.

Willdre's photo casebook

BRIAN'S BONKING BLINKERS: DAY 1



CONTINUES TOMORROW

HAVING PROBLEMS WITH YOUR (NON-EXISTENT) LIFE? THEN EMAIL 'DEAR WILLDRE' TODAY WITH YOUR TALES OF WOE. PREFERABLY JUICY SEXUAL ONES. WE PROMISE NOT TO LAUGH (TOO MUCH): LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

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